



Bats and Rabies: What You Should Know

Bats are being increasingly implicated as reservoirs for strains of the rabies virus that can be transmitted to humans.

Bats have small and very sharp teeth, and a bite can be difficult to detect. While not all bats have rabies, most human cases of rabies in the United States can be traced to bat bites.

Rabies is a serious disease caused by a virus. The virus is carried in the saliva and neural tissue of infected mammals and can be transmitted to humans, most commonly through a bite. The most commonly infected mammals in Maine are raccoons, skunks, foxes and bats.

What you can do if you think you've been exposed to a bat:

Any potential exposure to a bat requires a thorough evaluation. Determine if there is any possibility that human contact with the bat has occurred. These situations include:

- Being bitten, scratched or having other direct contact with a bat through a break in the skin or through the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose or mouth.
- Waking up from a deep sleep and finding a bat in the room.
- Witnessing a bat in the room of a previously unattended child, a person with intellectual disability or someone who has been drinking.
- Finding a bat in the room with a pet that was unattended. (Usually a pet is found carrying a bat in its mouth).



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If you believe that there has been contact with a person or a pet:

- The bat should be captured for rabies testing.
- If possible, contact an animal control officer, game warden, or pest management professional to capture live bats.

If you must capture the bat yourself, be sure to follow the following steps:

1. Use caution and avoid direct contact with the bat; wear leather gloves if possible.
2. Wait until the bat lands and cover it with a small box, coffee can, or other container.
3. Slip a piece of cardboard under the container to trap the bat.
4. Secure the bat by taping the cardboard tightly to the container.

5. Wash your hands with soap and water.
6. Call your local animal control officer, game warden, or pest management professional to assist in arranging for rabies testing of the bat at the Maine Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory.

It is important to avoid damaging the bat's head as it may hinder the ability for rabies testing to be performed.

If you cannot capture the bat for testing and you think you have been exposed:

- If bitten, wash the wound with soap and water and contact your healthcare provider to discuss medical treatment.
- Contact your healthcare provider even if you were not bitten but think that you may have been exposed to the bat. Medication may still be appropriate even in the absence of a demonstrable bite, scratch or mucous membrane exposure.

If the bat is still alive and there has been no exposure to people or pets:

- Let the bat to leave on its own in the easiest way possible. Close off the room and closet doors and open the windows. Turn on a light and watch the bat until it leaves.

To report any potential exposure to a bat:

- Call the Maine CDC at any time - 1-800-821-5821.

For more information about rabies and bats, visit these web sites:

- Maine CDC rabies website: <http://www.mainepublichealth.gov/rabies>
- Maine CDC Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory rabies website: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/public-health-systems/health-and-environmental-testing/rabies/rabies.htm>
- Maine Board of Pesticides Control "Got Pests?" website: <http://www.maine.gov/dacf/php/gotpests/othercritters/bats.htm>
- Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife bats website: http://www.maine.gov/ifw/wildlife/human/lww_information/bats.html
- Federal CDC Bats and Rabies website: <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/bats/index.html>