

RE: Rabies Risk through Incidental Exposure to Bats

“Keep the bat and call the Health Department.”

That is the central, simple message that should be conveyed to the public when dealing with a call regarding bats in residences. There is always a possibility, when dealing with a bat, that it may be rabid. Rabies occurs naturally in the bat population and bats may be ill with the disease and able to transmit it to humans while still behaving ‘normally.’

When a bat has been reported in a residence, the Health Department needs to evaluate whether contact, or potential contact with the bat occurred and whether the family and/or the family pets will need to be treated as a result. A person or unvaccinated pet can contract rabies from exposure to the bat’s saliva without being actually bitten by the bat. Rabies is a 100% fatal disease. Once contracted, death is always the result. Fortunately, post exposure shots are also 100% effective in preventing the onset of rabies in people.

However, post exposure shots, which require five visits to the ECMC Emergency Department and are quite expensive, can be avoided if the bat is available to be tested for rabies. The Health Department will test the bat at no cost to the resident. It is critical that you, as our first contact with people who may have been fatally exposed to rabies, provide callers with the appropriate information regarding bats, their capture and potential exposure.

Please utilize the attached fact sheets when providing information. My staff is available for in-service training should you and/or your staff be interested. Please call Peter Tripi at 961-7524 if you have any questions or require additional information. I thank you for your assistance in this vitally important matter.

New After-Hours Telephone # 716-961-7898

RABIES INFORMATION:



BATS

- FACT:** BATS, raccoons, skunks & foxes are the 4 warm blooded animals that are presumed to have rabies and must be avoided.
- FACT:** About 4% of all BATS submitted for testing have RABIES.
- FACT:** RABIES is 100% fatal once symptoms occur & 100% preventable with rabies shots.
- FACT:** Laboratory testing of the suspect rabid animal can be done to determine if the animal is infected with the RABIES virus.

WHEN TO CATCH THEM

- ▶ If you or your pet are bitten by a BAT, or if infectious material (saliva, “brain tissue”) from a BAT gets into your eyes, nose, mouth or a cut.
- ▶ If you wake up and find a BAT in your room.
- ▶ If you see a BAT in the room of a child or near a mentally impaired or an intoxicated person.
- ▶ If you are not sure if there has been a contact with a person or pet.

WHEN TO LET THEM GO

- ▶ **ONLY AFTER YOU HAVE CONTACTED THE LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT’S RABIES SPECIALIST AND HAVE BEEN ADVISED TO DO SO.**

HOW CAN I SAFELY CAPTURE A BAT IN MY HOME?

- ▶ If professional help is not available, capture the bat safely as described below.
- ▶ You will need leather work gloves a coffee can or similar hard- sided container, a piece of cardboard and tape.
- ▶ When the bat lands, move toward it slowly. While wearing the gloves, put the container or coffee can over the bat.
- ▶ Then, slide the cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside.
- ▶ Tape the lid to the container, and punch holes in the lid, allowing the bat to breathe.
- ▶ Do not attempt to kill or crush the bat. The skull of the bat must be intact for testing.
- ▶ If the bat is not alive; it must be refrigerated, not frozen.
- ▶ Do not use towels or blankets to capture bats; many people have been bitten through the fabric doing this.

Contact the Erie County Health Department at: 716-961-6800

If you or your pets come in contact with a bat after regular business hours, please call 716- 961-7898. ECHD staff will determine if the bat will be picked up for testing, and if it will be picked up, this will occur during regular business hours.