



FAQ sheet on Bats and Rabies

1. Why is there a concern about bats and rabies?

- Rabies is an infectious viral disease that affects the nervous system of humans and other mammals. People get rabies from the bite of an animal with rabies. Any wild mammal, like a raccoon, skunk, fox, coyote, or bat, can have rabies and transmit it to people.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control, most of the recent human rabies cases in the United States have been caused by rabies virus from bats. From 1990 to 2001, there were 35 cases of human rabies in the U.S., of those cases 26 (74%) were bat rabies virus.
- Information about bats and rabies can help people protect themselves, their families, and their pets. Not all bats carry rabies and bats play key roles in ecosystems, especially by eating insects, including agricultural pests. It is important to learn how to live safely with them.

2. Can I tell if a bat has rabies?

- Rabies can be confirmed only in a laboratory. However, any bat that is active by day, is found in a place where bats are not usually seen such as on the ground, or is unable to fly, is more likely than others to be rabid. Such bats are often easily approached. Therefore, it is best never to handle any bat.
- People cannot get rabies just from seeing a bat in an attic, in a cave, or at a distance. In addition, people cannot get rabies from having contact with bat guano (feces), blood, or urine. Rabies is only spread by bat saliva

3. What should I do if there is a bat in my home?

- If you have a bat in your home, do not let the bat fly out the window. Do not kill it and put it in the garbage. Contact Animal Control (815-334-4470) and if it is in your living area, they can assist you in catching the bat. If you catch the bat yourself, use precautions to capture the bat safely, as described below.

What you will need:

- leather work gloves (put them on)
- small box or coffee can
- piece of cardboard
- tape

When the bat lands, approach it slowly, while wearing the gloves, and place the box or coffee can over it. Slide the cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. Tape the cardboard to the container securely, and punch small holes in the cardboard, allowing the bat to breathe. Animal control can then send the bat to the Illinois Department of Public Health Laboratory for testing to see if the bat has rabies.

- If you are unable to catch the bat or it can no longer be located, contact the McHenry County Department of Health Communicable Disease Program. The nurse will ask questions as to where the bat was found, when the bat was found and additional questions to determine the nature of your possible contact with the bat. The nurse will then contact the Illinois Department of Public Health Veterinarian and receive recommendation whether rabies post exposure treatment is required.

4. Who should get rabies shots?

- If the bat found in someone's home was able to be sent to the laboratory for testing and the results are negative for rabies, then no rabies shots need to be given. This is why it is so important to have the bat available for testing
- If the bat from someone's home is positive for rabies, the nature of the contact will be determined by the Communicable Disease Program nurse, who will then contact the Illinois Department of Public Health Veterinarian and receive recommendation whether rabies post exposure treatment is required. Some of the situations that usually require treatment include:
 - Bat bite
 - Presence of bat saliva in a mucus membrane or skin abrasion
 - Physical contact with a bat without heavy gloves where either a bat bite or bat saliva entering a mucus membrane or skin abrasion cannot be ruled out
 - Live bat found in the room with a sleeping person
 - Live bat found in a room with a small child or other person who cannot clearly indicate whether a bite or saliva exposure may have taken place

Another important thing to remember about bats is that bat teeth are so small that a health care provider cannot physically examine a person to determine if a bat bite has taken place. Also, a bite can close within ½ hour and not be visible upon examination

- If no bat is available for testing, the Communicable Disease Nurse will question the individual to determine the type of exposure that has taken place and will consult with the Illinois Department of Public Health Veterinarian to see if rabies treatment is recommended.

5. What should I do if I think I might have had contact with a bat?

- Contact the McHenry County Department of Health Communicable Disease Program at 815-334-4500 and contact McHenry County Animal Control at 815-334-4470. Office hours are 8-4:30, however, someone is on call at all times.
- Contact your family physician

6. I've heard that rabies shots are very painful. Is this true?

- Rabies shots are no more painful than any other shot. Rabies kills if it is not prevented. Once signs of the disease appear in an animal or a human, they usually die within 10 days. In humans, there are cases of symptoms not appearing for up to seven years. However, you can get anti-rabies shots to fight off the disease. Rabies shots need to be given as soon as possible after a bite has occurred, before symptoms appear. The vaccination consists of a series of five shots and an initial shot of rabies immunoglobulin. The shots are given over 28 days.
- One shot is given around the area of the bite. The rest are given in the arm. Sometimes an additional shot is required the first day if they are unable to give it all around the site of the bite. The rabies shots produce an immune response which helps the body fight off the virus. The shot makes the body produce antibodies that then kill the virus.



6. What should I do if my dog or cat has contact with a bat?

- If you think your pet or domestic animal has been bitten by a bat or is found carrying or playing with a bat, contact your veterinarian and the health department for assistance immediately and have the bat tested for rabies. Keep vaccinations current for cats, dogs, and other animals.

5. What is the bat/rabies situation in McHenry County?

- As of August 7, 12 McHenry County residents are receiving treatment to prevent rabies after exposure to bats
- 5 of those individuals had exposure to bats at a camp in Ohio
- As of August 7, bats have tested positive for rabies in McHenry County
- Bats are most active from July through October

7. What can I do to protect my family from possible bat and rabies exposure?

- If you have bats in your home and need assistance in "bat-proofing" your home, contact The McHenry County Department of Health Environmental Division at 815-334-4585.
- To prevent rabies, teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly. Teach them to alert you to the presence of bats in the yard or in the home.
- Keep rabies vaccinations up to date on your pets

For additional information on rabies, go to:

Site for kids

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/kidsrabies/default.htm>

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies/>

Bats and Bat Exclusion

<http://www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/pcbats.htm>