

Management of Human–Bat Encounters

ANIMAL BITES AND RABIES RISK:

A GUIDE FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

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Bat encounters and bat bites

Most people who have been bitten by a bat report a stinging or needle prick sensation. However, bat bites may not be noticed, especially if someone is asleep, and bat bites may leave little or no evidence of a wound or puncture. Therefore, if there is any chance that there was physical contact with a bat, the bat should be tested for rabies. If the bat is not available for testing, then rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) should be administered.

When should a bat be submitted for rabies testing?

- A person has been bitten or has had any physical contact with a bat.
- A person wakes up to find a bat in the room where they were sleeping.
- A bat is found in a room with an unattended young child that cannot reliably report what happened.
- A bat is found in a room with anyone who cannot reliably communicate whether there was physical contact.

How to capture a bat and submit it for testing

See [How to Properly Catch a Bat for Rabies Testing.\(PDF\)](#).

[LINK <http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/rabies/risk/batcomic.pdf>]_handout.

- Use a container with a lid. Do not use pillowcases, blankets or towels, as bats may bite through fabric.
- Wear heavy-duty or thick leather gloves. Bats can bite through gardening, latex gloves, or dish gloves.
- Wait for the bat to land. Approach the bat slowly and place the container over the bat. Then slide the lid (or a piece of cardboard) underneath the bat and flip the container over, trapping the bat inside.
- Secure the lid with tape. Create small breathing holes in the lid using scissors.
- Whenever possible, do not smash a bat with an object. The brain must remain intact for the bat to be tested for rabies, and it is easy to crush a bat's skull.
- There is no need to kill the bat; the bat may be hand delivered alive to the Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory during normal business hours for testing or it may be euthanized by a veterinarian prior to submission.
- If the bat is dead, keep it cool in a refrigerator, but avoid freezing. If the bat has been inadvertently frozen, it is still worthwhile to submit it as many will still be testable.
- Whenever possible, deliver the bat in person to the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, keeping it cool during transport. Hand delivery reduces the time to testing, which can be important for maintaining sample quality, especially during summer months.
- If hand delivery is not possible, you may contact a local veterinary clinic to euthanize the bat (if necessary), package it, and arrange for next-day delivery to the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory. Next-day delivery is not an option on weekends as the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory is closed.
- In some Minnesota communities, an animal control officer or pest-control professional may be called to capture a bat and submit it for rabies testing.
- Submit the bat for rabies testing (For more information on rabies specimen submission, including after-hours submissions, see: [Rabies Testing](#). [LINK <http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/rabies/risk/submission.html>]).

- Deliver the bat in person to the Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory and the University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center, St. Paul Campus of the University of Minnesota ([map](#)). [LINK <http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/rabies/risk/mapvdl.html>]

Assessment of the need for rabies PEP following a bat encounter

- Administration of rabies PEP should generally be deferred until the results of a rabies test are known. Test results are available within 1 to 2 business days and only 3% to 4% of bats test positive for rabies.
- PEP should be initiated when there is a human/bat encounter during which physical contact occurred or may have occurred, and the bat is not available for testing.
- 24/7 telephone consultation on potential rabies exposure is available to health care providers, veterinarians, public health professionals, and law enforcement at 651-201-5414. Rabies consultations are available to the public at the same number Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Last Updated: 02/11/2025