



## Bats and Rabies



Bats are an essential part of our ecosystem. Bats eat insects, they pollinate plants and crops, they spread plant seeds, and they are an important indicator species for monitoring the health of our environment.

Sometimes we encounter bats in our homes. If you do encounter a bat it is important to remember that bats can carry the rabies virus and they should never be touched or handled. Rabies is preventable by taking precautions such as avoiding contact with bats and all wild animals, bat-proofing your home, and vaccinating your pets.

### Why should I be concerned about rabies and bats?

- Bats are mammals and can carry the rabies virus.
- Unlike other animals that carry rabies, bats cannot be vaccinated using baits.
- Rabies is spread through the saliva of an infected animal (e.g. bites or scratches).
- The small teeth of a bat can make it difficult to identify a bite.
- Rabies is a fatal disease.

### What should I do if I come into contact with a bat?

- If you have been bitten, scratched, or exposed to the saliva of a bat call your doctor immediately.
- If you have been bitten, scratched, or exposed to the saliva of a bat wash the exposed area immediately with soap and water for at least 15 minutes.
- Report the potential rabies exposure to the Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit (HNHU):
  - Monday to Friday between 8:30 a.m - 4:30 p.m. 519-426-6170 or 905-318-6623
  - Monday to Friday after 4:30 p.m., on weekends, and holidays: 1-877-298-5888
- Contact the HNHU about how to get the bat tested for rabies.

### What should I do if I find a bat inside my home?

- If you are bitten, scratched, or exposed to the saliva of a bat seek medical attention and follow the previous steps.
- If you find a bat in a room with a child or adult that cannot give a reliable history of contact with the bat, call your doctor immediately and report the encounter to the HNHU.
- Try to keep the bat in one room. Make sure that no one touches the bat.
- Contact a professional (e.g. animal control services) to capture the bat. Do not try to capture it yourself.
- Prevent access to your living space by bat-proofing your home. For example, install window and door screens, use draft-guards under doors that lead to attics, cap chimneys, and seal all openings into your house such as cracks or plumbing holes. It is recommended that you do this in the fall and winter months so you do not trap any bats in your home that may be there in the summer.

### What should I do if my pet comes into contact with a bat?

- Call your veterinarian to discuss the care of your pet.
- Protect your pet by keeping their rabies vaccinations up to date.

**Note:** All dogs and cats three months of age and over must have up-to-date rabies vaccination status. Vaccinating your pet not only protects your pet from rabies infection, but also protects you, your family, and your community if your pet is exposed to the virus.

For more information contact the Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit at 519-426-6170 or 905-318-6623, or visit our webpage at <https://hnhu.org/health-topic/rabies/>

Updated January 2021

