

What is rabies, how is it spread and where is it found?

Rabies is a preventable viral disease most often transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal. Rabies can spread to people from bats after minor, seemingly unimportant, or unrecognized bites or scratches.

Rabies is prevalent throughout North America. Bats are the most common source of rabies in the U.S.

The vast majority of rabies cases reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) each year occur in wild animals like bats, raccoons, skunks, and foxes, although any mammal can get rabies.

Are rabid bats a threat to human health?

Yes. Bats are the leading cause of rabies deaths in people in the United States. 5 people died from rabies from bats in 2021- the most in a decade.

Are all bats rabid?

No. Most bats are healthy and contribute to our environment in many ways, particularly by controlling insect pests.

Is rabies always fatal?

Rabies virus has to travel to the brain before it can cause symptoms. Rabies is nearly always fatal once symptoms appear.

The rabies virus infects the central nervous system. If a person does not receive the appropriate medical care after a potential rabies exposure, the virus can cause disease in the brain, ultimately resulting in death.

Rabies can be prevented by vaccinating pets, staying away from wildlife, and seeking medical care after potential exposures before symptoms start.

Can bats transmit rabies without showing signs of sickness?

There is no evidence that bats can transmit rabies for an extended period without being ill. Bats, like other mammals, become sick and eventually die from the disease. Bats infected with rabies may have the virus in their saliva and may transmit the disease through bites to humans and other animals.

How can someone tell whether a bat has rabies?

Rabid bats may show abnormal behavior, such as outdoor activity during daylight; rabid bats may be grounded, paralyzed, or may bite a person or animal. Not all rabid bats act abnormally, but bats that do are more likely to have rabies. **You cannot tell if a bat has rabies by looking at it!**

Bat Rabies

Managing Bat Encounters

Keeping Bats out of a Home

Common Points of Entry



**If any chance of bat contact, do not release the bat!
Safely capture the bat and contact your local health
department to arrange to have bat tested**

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Prevent. Promote. Protect.

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***Excerpts from New York State Department of Health's Publication
3003, "Bat Rabies in New York State" and CDC.**

What can be done to keep bats out of a home or other buildings?

Unnecessary killing of bats is not environmentally sound, humane, or a permanent solution to the problem. There are no chemicals or pesticides registered for this purpose, and use of unregistered pesticides and chemicals creates a risk of long-term toxic exposure to humans and causes sick or dying bats to be grounded in the community, further increasing the chance of contact with people and pets.

Bats should be kept out of places with a high risk of bat contact with humans or pets (for example, schools, hospitals, prisons, homes, children's camps) by closing or covering openings that allow entry to the roost (Figure 5). To find these openings, watch bats leave or enter the building at dusk or just before dawn. To "batproof" (prevent reentry), use polypropylene bird netting, fly screening, sheet metal, wood, various caulking compounds, or other construction materials impervious to bats. Keep in mind that some house bats can pass through crevices as thin as a pencil. Before batproofing, make sure there are no bats already in the roost. The best time to batproof is late fall through winter when most bats are hibernating in caves, or at night when bats are feeding away from the roost. Batproofing should not be done during the period from late May until mid-August, to avoid trapping baby bats in the roost. All openings except one or two major exits may be closed in advance, and the last openings sealed while the animals are away.

Enclosed building overhangs can be opened to eliminate known bat roost sites. To discourage roosting behind shutters, these should be spaced an inch or more from the wall to allow more light and ventilation. Old roofing materials may need to be replaced, and spaces between chimneys and exterior walls may need to be filled as well. Because bat boxes may bring bats into closer contact with people, their use close to homes or populated areas is not recommended. However, bat boxes may be beneficial in certain circumstances when carefully used as part of a comprehensive bat roost management program.

It is important that everyone, especially children, be educated about bats and rabies. Emergency room personnel and physicians also should keep informed about the proper management of bat bites. Additional educational materials may be available from your local health authority.

Updated 4/22/2022

Visit this New York State Department of Health link for a video on how to catch a bat (Video link is at the top Left of page): <https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/zoonoses/rabies/>

How should an encounter with a bat be managed?

Safely capture the bat if possible or suspected contact is made. Contact could be a bite, scratch, or other physical contact. If contact occurred, immediately wash the affected area thoroughly with soap and water, seek medical attention, and contact the local health authority. The possibility of contact exists if a bat may have been close to an unattended young child, a person who was sleeping, a person with sensory or mental impairment, or a pet.

If any chance of bat contact, do not release the bat! Safely capture the bat and contact your local health department to arrange to have bat tested.

Bats should never be handled. Do not disturb bats and avoid direct contact. Bats seen foraging on summer evenings, roosting in unoccupied buildings or hibernating in caves or mines should be enjoyed from a distance.

For rabies-related problems or questions and to report a suspected rabies exposure, call your local health authority, who may also be able to provide guidance on bat problems.

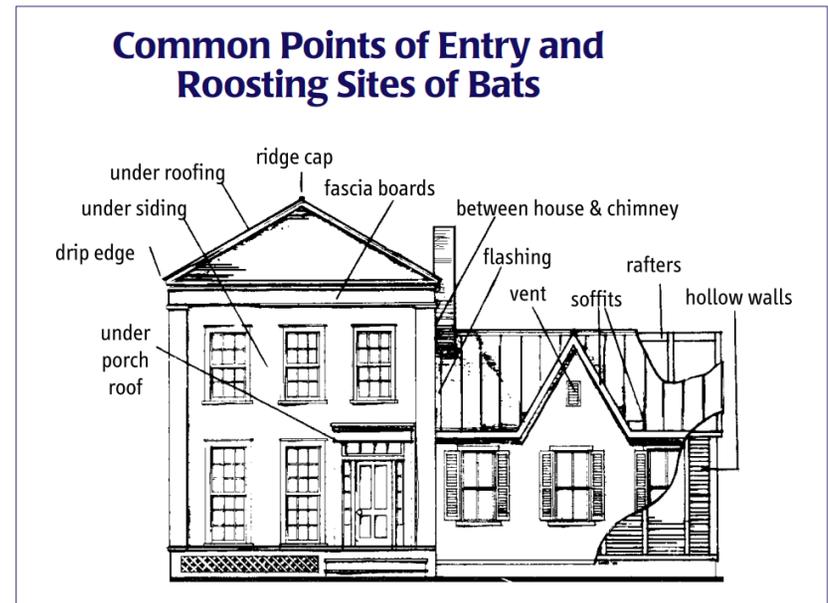


Figure 5