

# **BATS & RABIES**

## **Introduction**

Rabies is an infectious viral disease that affects the nervous system of humans and other mammals. Rabies is almost always contracted from the bite of an infected animal.

If untreated, rabies is fatal. In the United States, human fatalities associated with rabies occur in people who fail to seek medical assistance, usually because they were unaware of their exposure. The vast majority of rabies cases reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) each year occur in wild animals like raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes.

Rabid bats have been documented in 49 states. Recent epidemiologic data suggests that transmission of rabies virus can occur from minor or unrecognized bat bites. Recognition of a bat bite is difficult. Often, the wound is virtually invisible. Most punctures are a millimeter or less in diameter, and most bat inflicted scratch marks are less than one centimeter long.

If a bat enters a cabin or sleeping area in the middle of the night, it could bite someone while they are sleeping and leave without detection. For example, if a bat were found in the morning in the sleeping quarters at a recreation and educational camp, all children in that room should receive the post-exposure treatment. Also people hauling firewood or moving outdoor lumber piles may be bitten by a bat.

## **What is the recommended treatment for a known or suspected rabies exposure?**

Modern rabies treatment is highly effective and relatively painless. After a bite, immediately wash the wound with soap and water for at least 10 minutes. If your medical provider feels you had a rabies exposure, you will be treated with a series of shots. These shots will provide you with immunity to the disease if given soon after an exposure. Unfortunately, there is no known effective treatment for rabies once symptoms appear.

## **How can I safely remove a bat from inside a building?**

Do not release or kill a bat unless you are sure that no one was bitten or scratched. If you are sure no human exposure has occurred, confine the bat to one room. Open windows or doors leading to the outside. The bat will probably leave soon. If not, the bat can be caught when it lands. Approach it slowly.

While wearing leather work gloves, place a box or coffee can over it. Slide a piece of cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. Tape the cardboard to the container securely. Release it outdoors away from people and pets. If human exposure has occurred, do not release it! Contact the health department or animal-control authority to make arrangements for rabies testing.

### **How to bat-proof a dwelling**

Most bats wander into human living quarters through a loose fitting door, an open window, an unscreened chimney, or a gap in an outside wall. Bats only need about a half inch of space to enter.

The best time to bat proof is in the fall after young bats have learned to fly and before the onset of cold weather. Observe where the bats exit at dusk and exclude them by loosely hanging clear plastic sheeting or bird netting over these areas (bats can leave, but cannot reenter). After bats have been excluded, the openings can be permanently sealed. All obvious accesses should be sealed.

To cover louvered vents or large gaps and cracks, use window screening or hardware cloth. Fill smaller cracks with expanding foam insulation or caulking compound. Make sure that all window and door screens are in good condition and contain no holes. Unlike rodents, bats do not chew holes so they are more easily excluded.