

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fall Temperatures Increase Chance of Rabies Exposure For Your Family & Pets

Eau Claire, WI – September 21st, 2023 – As temperatures drop, bats and other animals often look for a new home indoors. This increases the chance for bats to have accidental contact with our family members and household pets (even our indoor pets).

“If you find a bat in your home and you know or think the bat may have come in contact with a human and/or a family pet, it is important to try and capture the bat and call the Health Department at 715-839-4718 so it can be submitted for rabies testing,” says Savannah Bergman, Rabies Program Manager at the Health Department. If the bat isn’t caught and submitted for testing, the person who was exposed may need to get a series of expensive injections to prevent rabies.

Bat exposures happen when a person or pet has any physical contact with a bat. Bat exposures can also happen when a bat is found in the same room with an unattended child or pet, a person with an intellectual disability, an intoxicated person, or anyone who’s been sleeping in that room.

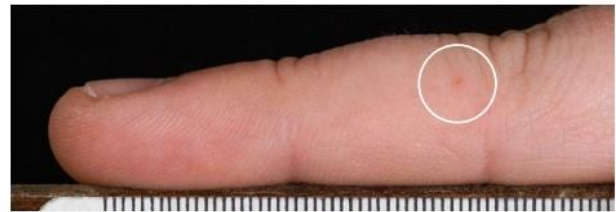


Photo of a bat bite on finger. Photo courtesy of CDC.

Bat bites can be very small, hard to see, or not seen at all.

“When capturing a bat, it is important to not expose yourself to the animal. Wear leather gloves and use an ice cream pail, coffee can, or similar-sized container to capture the bat. Then call the Health Department to walk through your situation and determine if the bat needs to be sent in for testing,” Bergman says.

In Wisconsin, skunks and bats are the animals most likely to carry the rabies virus by far. Bats don’t show signs of rabies, and it’s impossible to tell if they carry the virus without laboratory testing. It’s possible to get rabies even if you don’t see any bite marks from the animal. Bat bites or scratches can be so small that you don’t even notice them. Rabies is almost always transmitted through a bite, but it can also be transmitted if a rabid animal scratches a person, or if the animal’s saliva touches a break in the skin.

To prevent bat exposures, it’s important for people to look for possible entry points in their homes.

“Check the inside and outside of your home for any holes that might let bats enter. To stop bats from getting into your home, make sure to keep all door and window screens installed and in good condition, and repair any holes or gaps around your house. Bats will likely enter your home through a ridge cap or under flashing, fascia boards, eaves, soffits, or loose siding,” says Nolan Fadness, Environmental Health Specialist at the Health Department.

If you have bats in your home, try to observe where they exit at dusk. The CDC recommends loosely hanging clear plastic sheeting or bird netting over the areas where bats exit to prevent them from returning to your home. It's important to let any remaining bats crawl out and leave but prevent them from re-entering. When the bats are out of the home, entry spots can be repaired and sealed.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources provides do-it-yourself instructions and information on hiring a professional to remove bats through a process called exclusion. Exclusion involves sealing a building except for primary exits, which have one-way doors installed that let bats exit but prevent re-entry. [For information on exclusion, click here.](#)

If you, your family, or your pets are exposed to a bat or wild animal, call your doctor right away and report the incident to the Health Department by calling 715-839-4718.



What is an exposure to rabies?



Yes. This is an exposure to rabies.

- A bite from any animal, including wild and stray animals or domestic pets.
- Animal saliva or brain tissue that gets into a person's scratch, wound, or mucous membrane (example: nose, eyes).



Maybe. This is a potential exposure to rabies.

- A bat in a room with an unattended child, a person with an intellectual disability, an intoxicated person, or anyone who's been sleeping.
- A bat in firewood that had been hand-carried into a home.



No. This is not an exposure to rabies.

- Seeing a bat flying nearby.
- Seeing a bat in your attic or in a cave.