

When to seek medical advice

Get medical care if a bat has scratched or bitten you.

Bat bites can be very small. Sometimes you may not notice them. So you should also contact your medical provider or the health department if you aren't sure whether you've been exposed. Also seek help if you find a bat:

- in a room where people have been sleeping;
- near an unattended child;
- near a person with a mental disability; or
- near someone who is intoxicated.

Also seek medical advice for any child who:

- is found handling a bat;
- reports being "hit" by a bat;
- is found unattended near a bat and is not able to explain what happened; or
- has been sleeping in a room where a sick bat is found.

You cannot get rabies from:

- seeing a bat;
- touching something a bat has touched; or
- touching bat guano (feces), blood, or urine; or
- a bat flying in your vicinity but not touching you.

Remember, never touch a bat!

More information

About rabies:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/rabies

About bats:

Bat Conservation International
www.batcon.org

About pets and rabies:

American Humane Association
www.americanhumane.org/animals/adoption-pet-care/safety/rabies-facts-prevention.html



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Cover photo of Big Brown Bat
courtesy of Kristi DuBois,
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

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Bats and Rabies



A public health guide

Bats can be helpful creatures. They eat tons of insect pests. But bats can carry rabies, and they can infect people with this deadly disease.

Never touch a bat!



**Lewis & Clark
Public Health**

Bats can be good neighbors

All bats in Montana spend their nights eating large numbers of mosquitoes and other insects that damage crops and transmit diseases like West Nile virus.

Bats can be very helpful to have around.

But bats, like most other mammals, can carry rabies. It's important to be aware of the facts about bats and rabies so you can protect yourself, your family, and your pets.

Beware bats behaving badly

Fewer than 1 percent of bats in North America have rabies. Still, most human rabies cases in the United States are caused by bats.

You should be especially suspicious of any bat that is acting strangely. This could include:

- being active during the day;
- being unable to fly; or
- seeming tame or unafraid of people.

These could be signs that a bat has rabies!

Rabies is deadly but treatable

Rabies is an infectious disease that affects the nervous system. It's almost always fatal. It's transmitted through the bite or scratch of an infected animal.

Many people are successfully treated each year after being bitten by a rabid animal. A few people die of rabies each year in the United States. Usually that's because they don't recognize the risk of rabies and don't seek medical help.

If you believe you have been exposed to rabies, you should contact your medical provider right away. If possible, capture the bat so it can be sent to a laboratory for rabies testing.

Rabies is preventable with a series of vaccinations. These should be given as soon as possible after exposure to the virus. Don't wait to see if you have symptoms. Current vaccines are relatively painless and are given in your arm, like a flu or tetanus shot.

Who to contact

- **City of Helena Animal Control Office:** 447-8461
- **Lewis & Clark County Animal Control Office:** 447-8293
- **Lewis and Clark Public Health:** 457-8900 during business hours; 406-523-5564 after hours

Capture a bat with caution

Whenever possible, a bat that has potentially exposed a person or pet to rabies should be safely captured and submitted for testing.

If you've had direct contact with a bat, contact:

- Animal Control, 447-8461 (in Helena); 447-8293 (rest of county)
- Lewis and Clark Public Health, 457-8900 during business hours, 406-523-5564 after business hours

If professional help isn't available, use precautions to capture the bat safely so it can be tested for rabies.

You'll need:

- leather work gloves
- a small box, coffee can, or similar container
- a piece of cardboard
- tape

When the bat lands, approach it slowly, while wearing the gloves, and place the container over it. Slide the cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. Tape the cardboard to the container securely. Punch small holes in the cardboard to allow the bat to breathe.

Make sure to keep the bat's head intact, since rabies is diagnosed by testing the brain.

Contact Animal Control or the health department to arrange for rabies testing.