

Bats and Rabies

July 2016

Finding bats in the house is on the rise at this time of year. This is because attics are the place in a house where bats usually choose to roost and raise their young. After a few hot summer days, an attic can become too warm for the bats, forcing them into people's living quarters as they search for cooler places to roost. In addition, baby bats born earlier in the summer are getting old enough to start exploring on their own. Inexperienced young bats may fly down a chimney, through an open window, or down attic stairs. This may place them in proximity to or even in direct contact with, people.

Here are several important points to keep in mind when you find a bat in the house:

Do not release the bat outdoors until you can safely rule out that an exposure occurred. Situations that should be investigated as potential exposures are:

- a person has had direct contact with a live bat and cannot rule out that a bite or scratch may have occurred;
- a sleeping person awaking to find a bat in the room;
- an adult witnesses a bat in the room with a previously unattended child, mentally disabled person, intoxicated person or domestic pet.

Simply finding a bat inside a home does not, in itself, indicate that a potential exposure has occurred.

When necessary, bats should be safely captured using the following technique and while wearing thick leather gloves. Wait until the bat lands, cover the bat with a coffee can (or similar container), and slide cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. Avoid doing anything that might crush the bat's skull and make it unsuitable for testing.

Never handle a bat with bare hands. Information on capturing a bat is available at <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/cdc/rabies/bat-capturing.pdf>.

If there has been potential exposure to a person or pet, contact the Pittsfield Health Department/Animal Control Officer at 413-499-9411. When it is necessary to submit a bat for testing to the Massachusetts State Public Health Laboratory (MASPHL), the Animal Control Officer will arrange for shipping by a local veterinarian.

If the bat is found to be rabid, or the bat is unavailable for testing, post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) should be considered. Decisions about exposures and the need for PEP should be made in consultation with a healthcare provider or public health.

Owners are legally required to keep their pet dogs and cats up-to-date on their rabies vaccinations. Currently vaccinated dogs and cats exposed to bats that are unavailable for testing, may need to receive a booster shot and/or be quarantined. Unvaccinated animals exposed to bats unavailable for testing pose a significant risk to other animals and people and may need to be quarantined for a prolonged period or occasionally even euthanized, at the owner's expense.

If you have questions about potential rabies exposures please call the Pittsfield Health Department 413-499-9411 or the MDPH, Division of Epidemiology and Immunization at (617) 983-6800, or visit www.mass.gov/dph/rabies.