

# Rabid bats found: IDPH encourages people to be on look out this year

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SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) wants people to beware of rabid animals, including bats, as they become more active this time of year. To date, more than a dozen rabid bats have been reported in Illinois this year.

“Most cases of rabies in Illinois are almost always found in bats,” said IDPH Director Nirav D. Shah, M.D., J.D. “You can’t tell just by looking at a bat if it has rabies so it’s important to avoid handling bats and to make sure your home has no openings where bats can come in.”

Rabies is a virus that affects the nervous system. People can get rabies after being bitten by an infected animal. Rabies can also be contracted when saliva from a rabid animal gets directly into a person’s eyes, nose, mouth, or a wound. People usually know when they have been bitten by a bat, but bats have very small teeth and the bite mark may not

be easy to see. If you find yourself in close proximity to a bat and are not sure if you were exposed, for example – you wake up and find a bat in your room, do not kill or release the bat before calling your doctor or local health department to help determine if you could have been exposed to rabies and need preventive treatment. If the bat is available for testing and test results are negative, preventive treatment is not needed.

The early symptoms of rabies in people are similar to that of many other illnesses, including fever, headache, and general weakness or discomfort. As the disease progresses, more specific symptoms appear and may include insomnia, anxiety, confusion, slight or partial paralysis, excitation, and hallucinations. Death usually occurs within days of the onset of these symptoms. If you have been bitten by any animal, seek immediate medical attention. Rabies preventive treatment, if needed, must begin quickly.

An animal does not have to be aggressive or exhibit other symptoms to have rabies. Changes in any animal's normal behavior can be early signs of rabies. A bat that is active during the day, found on the ground, or is unable to fly is more likely than others to be rabid. Such bats are often easily approached, but should never be handled.

### **The following tips can help prevent the spread of rabies:**

Keep vaccinations up-to-date for all dogs, cats, ferrets, and other animals you own. If your pet is exposed to a rabid animal, contact your veterinarian

Do not touch, feed, or unintentionally attract wild animals with open garbage cans or litter.

Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home. Do not try to nurse sick, wild animals to health. Call animal control or an animal rescue agency for assistance.

Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly. "Love your own, leave other animals alone" is a good principle for children to learn to reduce the risk of exposures to rabid animals.

Maintain homes and other buildings so bats cannot get inside.

If a bat is in your home, do not release the bat outdoors until after speaking with animal control or public health officials.

After consulting with animal control or public health officials, you may need to capture the bat for rabies testing to determine if you need preventive treatment.

### **Steps you can take to capture the bat are:**

When the bat lands, approach it slowly, while wearing gloves, and 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, and punch small holes in the cardboard, allowing the bat to breathe.

For more information about keeping bats out of your home, check out the [Bats and Bat Exclusion](#) page on our website.