

## Frequently Asked Questions about Bats and Rabies

Bats play key roles in our ecosystem by eating insects, pollinating plants and scattering seeds. However, some can also carry diseases that are dangerous for humans, like rabies, a fatal virus spread from mammals to humans. Over the past few years, most human cases of rabies in the United States have been caused by bat bites.

Any bat can carry the virus, and it's impossible to tell if a bat has rabies by looking at it. **This is why you should never touch a bat, and immediately see a doctor if you think you may have been bitten or scratched by a bat.**

### Abnormal behaviors for bats include being:

- Active during the day
- Unable to fly from elevation
- Easily approachable
- Found in a place where they are not usually seen (like in your home or on your lawn)



### What if you find a bat outside?

Bats are wild animals, surviving best when outside in their natural environment. If you see a bat outside you can look, but don't touch. **If you find a bat on the ground and it appears sick or injured, NEVER touch it.**

Wild animals are not used to being touched by people and touching them may cause further injury or stress and even pose a health risk to you.



### What if you're bitten or scratched by a bat?

If you, a member of your family, or one of your pets is bitten or scratched by a bat immediately wash the wound with warm soapy water and seek medical care. Anyone bitten by the bat must undergo rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), a series of multiple vaccines, as soon as possible to prevent becoming ill. Rabies is a fatal infection but people who have been exposed can prevent illness and death if they seek care before symptoms start. If the bat can be captured it will be tested for rabies. If it tests negative, PEP is not necessary.



For more information about rabies, visit [hhs.iowa.gov/public-health/center-acute-disease-epidemiology/rabies-information-public-providers-and-veterinarians](https://hhs.iowa.gov/public-health/center-acute-disease-epidemiology/rabies-information-public-providers-and-veterinarians)

or contact the Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology at 800-362-2736 with questions.



## What if you find a bat in your home?

If there is any chance that a person or pet had contact with the bat, the bat should be safely captured, **WITHOUT TOUCHING IT**, and tested for rabies.

To safely capture a bat:

1. Close all doors and windows to prevent the bat from escaping.
2. Find a small container and a piece of cardboard large enough to cover the opening of the container. Punch small air holes in the cardboard.
3. Put on leather work gloves.
4. When the bat lands, approach it slowly and without touching it, place the container over it then slide the cardboard under the container to trap the bat inside. **Tape the cardboard to the container, securing the bat inside.**
5. If a human had skin-to-skin contact with the bat, testing can be done at the [State Hygienic Lab](#) free of cost. If a pet had contact with the bat, testing can be done at the cost of the submitter through the [Iowa State Veterinary Diagnostic Lab](#).
6. If you are certain there was no contact between the bat and any people or pets in your home, carefully hold the cardboard over the container and take the bat outdoors to release it away from people and pets. Remember, bats cannot take flight from the ground, so they may need to climb to an elevation to fly. However, during the winter, consider reaching out to a [licensed wildlife rehabilitator](#).

**WARNING:** If you think a bat was in a room with a person that cannot state: *“I did not touch the bat and know I was not bitten,”* the bat needs to be submitted for rabies testing. This includes finding a bat in the room of a young child, toddler, or baby, a person with a learning disability, a sleeping person, or an inebriated person. **If the bat cannot be found and submitted for rabies testing, the person needs to be seen by a physician immediately to receive rabies vaccines.** This will help prevent them from becoming sick with rabies.



If you think bats have taken up residence in your home, contact a [licensed nuisance wildlife control operator](#) for guidance on exclusion. If you find a bat you suspect is sick or injured, contact a [licensed wildlife rehabilitator](#).