

Public Communications Toolkit for Bats

Iowa HHS is coordinating an awareness campaign about bats in Iowa with other state agencies. Historically, national awareness campaigns and outreach have focused on bats in nature or reducing rabies risk from bats but rarely covered both topics. The goal of the Iowa campaign is to raise awareness of the importance of bats to our ecosystem and the risk of rabies associated with some bats. With the continued risk of white-nose syndrome to bat populations in Iowa and recent human rabies deaths related to bat exposures in neighboring states ([Minnesota](#), [Nebraska](#), [Illinois](#)), it is important to educate the public about each topic.

Overall Communication Goals:

- The role of bats in nature
- Observe but don't touch bats
- How to mitigate exposures to bats (for people, pets, and livestock)
- What to do if a person or animal (pet or livestock) is bitten or comes into direct contact with a bat

Overall Communication Strategy

To reach a wide audience and knowing not all participating groups will want to message regarding all topics, a variety of stock messaging and images are provided. This will allow groups to select or adapt messaging fitting their organization's mission while participating in the larger campaign. To link messages groups are encouraged to use the [#Batsoflowa](#) hashtag.

Partners

- Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (Iowa HHS)
- Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS)

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Timeline

Iowa HHS receives the highest volume of bat related calls from the public every August. In Iowa bats seeking places to sleep/hibernate peaks in September. Therefore, **messaging will start in July 2025, run a total of 17 weeks, and end in October 2025.** With the goal of reducing the number of bat encounters occurring in Iowa this year while encouraging Iowans to always enjoy bats and nature at an appropriate distance.

Theme Timeline

Campaign Launch	July 8, 2025
Bats & Nature	July 8, 2025 – Sept. 6, 2025
Rabies Risks	July 8, 2025 – Sept. 6, 2025 & Oct. 19, 2025 – Nov. 1, 2025
Bat Exclusion	Aug. 31, 2025 – Nov. 1, 2025
Bats & Livestock/Agriculture	Sept. 7, 2025 – Oct. 4, 2025
Bats & Pets	Oct. 5, 2025 – Nov. 1, 2025
Halloween	Oct. 26, 2025 – Nov. 1, 2025

Social Media Stock Messages by Topic



The following are “canned” social media messaging. These can be used as is or adapted by your group. The social media images provided by Iowa HHS are available to use with these messages, or your organization can include its own image. With any message, please include the **#Batsoflowa** hashtag to link all messaging in Iowa.

Bats and Nature

Pest consumption is one of the many ecosystem services bats perform! Most insect-eating bats can consume up to 50% of their weight in insects each night, including mosquitoes! A pregnant or nursing bat can eat up to 100% of her body weight each night. Let bugs “play” with bats while people enjoy bats from a distance! #Batsoflowa

Big brown bats, the most common bat found in Iowa, use a wide range of habitats and often use man-made structures. They typically roost in caves and mines in the winter, and they can be found in trees, artificial structures, under rocks, and in piles of wood in the summer. The best way to enjoy bats is from a distance! #Batsoflowa

If you need help removing bats from your property, contact a Nuisance Wildlife Control Operator (NWCO). NWCOs are licensed by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and are not an agent or employee of the State of Iowa. Find a NWCO near you at [Nuisance Wildlife Control | Department of Natural Resources](#). #Batsoflowa

White-nose syndrome (WNS) is a fungal disease that impacts hibernating bats in North America, including Iowa. It shows up as visible white fungal growth on bats’ muzzles and wings. This cold-loving fungus infects bats during the winter when bats reduce their metabolic rate and lower their body temperature to save energy. Affected bats rouse from hibernation more frequently, making them burn through fat reserves and more vulnerable to starvation. Humans can accidentally carry the fungus on shoes and clothing between places where bats live. Another reason to never touch a bat and to always enjoy bats from a distance! #Batsoflowa

The best place to set up a bat box is on a 12 to 20-foot pole or post. This makes the box easy to move and easy to maintain. Don’t mount your box to trees because they get less sun and make bats vulnerable to predators. The branches and leaves can also make it more difficult for bats to drop into flight. The ideal bat homes should be mounted with a southern or southeast facing orientation in a spot that gets 6-8 hours of direct sunlight a day. Bat boxes on a building can encourage bats to be unwanted guests in your house so consider placing it at least 20-feet away from buildings and enjoy wildlife from a distance! #Batsoflowa

Rabies Risks

Each year, there are bats tested in Iowa that are positive for rabies. This is why you should never touch a bat with your bare hands.

If you or a family member are bitten by a bat, do your best to capture it so it can be tested to determine if the rabies vaccines series is needed to prevent rabies. There are ways to safely catch a bat. Find out [how to safely catch a bat](#). #Batsoflowa

If a bat is flying around in your home, don't try to hit it out of the air. Instead, wait for it to land then safely capture it. If you know the bat didn't bite a person or pet, release it outside. If it may have bitten a person or pet, you should have it tested to determine if shots (vaccines) to prevent rabies are needed. Learn [how to safely catch a bat](#). #Batsoflowa

Be aware if you find a bat indoors. A bat bite can be so small that it may be undetectable. If you don't know if the bat touched you, your family or pet, then you are considered potentially exposed to rabies

If a rabid bat bites a person, shots (vaccines) are needed to prevent rabies. Learn [how to safely catch a bat](#). #Batsoflowa

Bats play a vital role in our ecosystem. Not all bats have rabies, but it's important to recognize possible signs of rabies in bats. Unusual behaviors that could indicate that a bat has rabies include:

- A bat that is active during the day.
- A bat that is found in unusual places (inside a home or on the ground).
- A bat that is unable to fly or is easily approached.

If you see strange bat behavior, do not touch or approach the bat. If you are bitten by a bat speak with your healthcare provider about shots (vaccines) to prevent rabies. Learn more about bats and rabies at the Iowa HHS rabies webpage ([Rabies - Information for Public, Providers and Veterinarians | Health & Human Services](#)). #Batsoflowa

You cannot get rabies from seeing a bat or touching bat poop.

It is recommended to never touch a bat. Bats are happiest when left alone. If you think you were bitten or scratched by a bat, talk with your healthcare provider about shots (vaccines) to prevent rabies. Learn more about bats and rabies at the Iowa HHS rabies webpage ([Rabies - Information for Public, Providers and Veterinarians | Health & Human Services](#)). #Batsoflowa

Avoid touching or handling bats, but if you need to pick up a bat, wear thick leather gloves.

If you encounter a sick or injured bat, contact a wildlife rescue/rehabilitation organization or local veterinarian for help. People who are trained in handling bats should be vaccinated and always use appropriate protection when interacting with bats. By following good practices and respecting wildlife – we can minimize risks while coexisting with bats. Learn how to safely catch a bat on the Iowa HHS rabies webpage ([Rabies - Information for Public, Providers and Veterinarians | Health & Human Services](#)). #Batsoflowa

Bat Exclusion

Bats do not chew their way into buildings but can squeeze through a hole as small as a dime! Keep bats out of your home by fixing torn window screens, broken siding, loose shingles, missing or broken chimney caps, and fill any holes for around your home that lead outside. #Batsoflowa

September and April are the best months to bat-proof your home. Most bats look for places in the fall and winter to hibernate. This will also prevent young bats, unable to fly from being trapped inside. #Batsoflowa

Trying to keep bats from coming back? Exclude bats by watching where they exit the building at dusk, then hang a flap made of clear plastic sheeting or bird netting over these areas. Bats will be able to leave, but not re-enter the building. #Batsoflowa

While bats can carry the rabies virus that can make people, pets, and livestock sick, the best way to protect the health of everyone is to protect the natural habitats of bats. When left alone, bats pose little risk. Keeping natural habitats available for bats prevents them from coming into close contact with humans, pets, and livestock; plus keeps bats safe! #Batsoflowa

Bats and Livestock/Agriculture

Bats get a bad rap but did you know they help protect crops from pests like earworm moths? To keep bats on the farm but out of the barn, consider placing a bat house away from livestock areas. #Batsoflowa

Bats are a natural source of insect control but they can pose disease risks to humans, livestock, and pets.

To stay safe:

- ✓ Keep barns, garages, and storage buildings closed when not in use.
- ✓ Check for and seal small openings where bats might enter to roost.
- ✓ Never handle bats with bare hands.
- ✓ Vaccinate your pets against rabies.
- ✓ Talk with your veterinarian to determine if you should vaccinate horses and livestock for rabies.

#Batsoflowa

Horses aren't the only creatures that seek shelter in the barn — it's natural for bats to roost in the rafters. While bats help control insects, they also carry disease risks to horses and their caretakers. Talk to your veterinarian to determine if you should vaccinate your horses against rabies. #Batsoflowa

Bats and Pets

Bats are commonly found in both urban and rural communities across Iowa, and they carry a risk of rabies to both humans and pets. Vaccinating your dogs and cats helps protect both your two and four-legged family members. #Batsoflowa

Bats may nest in your home, garage or barn, which could trigger your dog or cat's natural curiosity and hunting instincts. If you catch your pet playing with or eating a bat, talk to your veterinarian to determine if an additional rabies vaccine is needed. #Batsoflowa

Halloween

Bats don't Trick or Treat. But they can carry rabies. If you see a bat, don't touch it.
#Batsoflowa

If you see a bat while trick-or-treating, do not touch or pick it up with your bare hands – unless they are the candy kind!

Bats can carry rabies and make you very sick if you are bitten by one with the disease. Find out more about bat safety by visiting our website: <https://hhs.iowa.gov/health-prevention/animal-safety-and-disease-prevention/rabies> #Batsoflowa

There is a reason why bat costumes are popular at Halloween – they're spooky! And do you know what else is spooky – having a bat in your home!

If you find a bat flying inside your home, don't try to hit it out of the air. Instead, wait for it to land then safely capture it, but not with your bare hands! Use thick leather gloves if you have them or find someone to help. Find out more about bat safety by visiting our website: <https://hhs.iowa.gov/health-prevention/animal-safety-and-disease-prevention/rabies> #Batsoflowa

Stock Message for Healthcare Providers



The following “canned” messaging is for infection preventionists within healthcare systems to inform staff of where to find Iowa HHS rabies resources. Feel free to adapt this message and use it as an internal reminder for your staff.

More bats test positive for rabies yearly in Iowa than any other animal species. Bats are also the most active in our state during the fall as they search for places to hibernate for the winter. This is when most Iowans come into direct contact with bats, potentially getting exposed to rabies. Iowa HHS has created resources to help assess patient exposures to bats and decide when rabies post-exposure prophylaxis is warranted.

This resource has all the guidance you will need to assess rabies risks from any animal exposure, administer post-exposure prophylaxis, and if needed, order rabies titers: [Rabies | Health & Human Services](#).

Remember, the bite from a bat can be undetectable with the naked eye. That is why people found in rooms with bats who are unable to state, “I know the bat did not touch me,” should be considered potentially exposed and if possible, the bat tested for rabies. If the bat cannot be tested, or tests positive, these patients need rabies post-exposure prophylaxis.



Wound inflicted by canine teeth of a big brown bat (most common bat found in Iowa) while it was being handled; picture taken same day as bite.

Scripts for Voiceover Promotions

Iowa HHS has recorded two public service announcements with Radio Iowa. Partners that would like to adapt the scripts and record their own versions, or adapt them for another purpose, are more than welcome.

Bats Script 1 – Leave them alone to do their job

30-seconds

Did you know bats are bug-eating **heroes**? They help our ecosystem by eating mosquitoes and other pests. But here's the thing: **some** bats carry rabies. You can **look** but **don't** touch a bat and **never** use your bare hands to pick them up. Be a hero and leave bats alone in the wild to do their job, while you stay safe. Learn more at HHS Dot Iowa Dot Gov Slash Bats.

***Narrator:** A Public Service Announcement from [your organization name]. (fast read)*

Word Count: 85

Bats Script 2 – how they get into buildings

30-seconds

Iowa! Did you know bats don't chew, but squeeze their way into buildings? And a dime-sized hole is all it takes for a bat to get inside! Keep bats out by repairing torn screens or broken siding, and sealing holes that lead to the outside. And remember not to touch or pick bats up, especially with your bare hands because they could carry rabies. Learn more at HHS Dot Iowa Dot Gov Slash Bats

***Narrator:** A Public Service Announcement from [your organization name]. (fast read)*

Word Count: 88