



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Rabies and Camping Safety

Camping Safety

Millions of people enjoy camping every year in the United States. Very few individuals will ever be exposed to an animal with suspected rabies or need medical intervention due to exposure while camping. However, rabies is deadly and campers should be aware and reduce their risk of exposure. To date, no human rabies cases from bats have implicated camping as a risk factor. Presence of bats outdoors and in camping situations is normal.

Reduction of Risk

- Avoid contact with bats or wild animals. Enjoy viewing animals from a distance in their natural environment.
- Sleep in tents, under mosquito netting, or use screens.
- Do not leave children unsupervised in caves, or where they could come into contact with wild animals.
- Teach children never to handle unfamiliar or wild animals even if they appear friendly.
- Rabid animals often behave differently and can lose their fear of humans. Stay clear of these animals.

How can I tell if a bat has rabies?

Rabies can only be confirmed in a laboratory; however, unusual behavior that may signal illness includes: bats that are active by day; bats found in usual places (such as in a room at home or on the lawn); or a bat that is on the ground and unable to fly.

What should I do if I come in contact with a bat?

If bitten, or if you have been exposed to infectious material, such as saliva or brain matter:

- Immediately wash the affected area with soap and water for ten minutes
- Seek medical help right away
- If possible, and without causing more injury, try to identify or capture the biting animal
- Contact your local health department or animal control agency as the animal may need to be tested or quarantined
- Post-exposure vaccination is essential if the animal tests positive for rabies or it cannot be captured.

Other situations where exposure is possible and you should seek medical advice

- If you are awakened by a bat landing on you;
- If you are awakened to find a bat in your tent or room; or
- If you see a bat with an unattended child or near a mentally impaired or intoxicated person.

If these situations are present, try and safely capture the bat for testing and seek medical advice.