

June 5, 2018

Reduce the risk of rabies this summer

Summer vacation is coming and many families are spending more time outside enjoying the weather. This can mean an increased risk of contact with bats, the primary carrier of rabies virus in B.C. Rabies is a very serious disease that affects the nervous system. It is almost always fatal if not treated in time. This is rare but it's still important to make sure you do what you can to avoid contact with bats.

Bats can fly into poorly sealed cabins and homes, they roost in attic spaces and they can even be found hanging inside closed patio umbrellas.

Interior Health offers these tips to help protect your family:

- Never touch live or dead bats. **Tell children not to play with or touch bats.**
- Make your home or cabin "bat proof." Keep doors and windows closed, make sure window screens don't have any holes, and keep the attic area free of bats by keeping all vents properly screened and by closing off other openings.
- Avoid locations or activities where bats are likely to be found (e.g., caves).
- If you find a live bat in a room of your home, open the window and close interior doors until the bat leaves.
- If your home or workplace is inhabited by bats, seek professional bat-control advice from a pest control or wildlife specialist. Bats are a protected species under the BC Wildlife Act. Excluding or evicting bats from their roost site so they move to another roost is the best way to remove bats.
- If trying to capture a bat yourself, avoid contact by wearing leather gloves, a hat, long sleeves, and pants.
- Safely contain the bat in a secure covered container to prevent others from being exposed. Keep the bat in a safe location until public health can arrange to pick it up and test it for rabies.
- If you have a pet dog, cat, or ferret, make sure they are vaccinated regularly against rabies. Pets that were born and raised in B.C. pose a very low risk of transmitting rabies to humans; however, vaccinating your pets will protect them from rabies. If your pet has come in contact with a bat, please contact your vet to discuss the risk of rabies to your pet.

All contact with bats should be taken seriously. Bats have tiny sharp teeth and claws, so scratches or bites may not be visible or painful but could still be there. If you have been bitten or scratched:

- Thoroughly wash the wounds with soap and water.
- Contact your local public health unit or family doctor immediately. Do not wait for symptoms to appear.
- Early treatment is crucial to prevent rabies from progressing. Treatment involves a two-week period of vaccinations that must be administered as soon as possible after exposure.

For more information:

See HealthLink BC File #07 at <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile07.stm>

BC Community Bat Programs: <http://www.bcbats.ca/>