



## Health Department Reminds Vermonters to Avoid Contact with Bats Trapped Inside Homes

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BURLINGTON – Every summer, the Health Department receives numerous calls from people who have found a bat inside their house. Because bats can carry rabies, careful consideration must be given to whether a person or pet has come in contact with the bat before deciding whether to capture it for testing or to release it outside.

Staff at the Vermont Rabies Hotline (1-800-472-2437 or 802-223-8697) can help people determine whether an exposure to a bat has put them at risk for rabies and, if necessary, help make arrangements to have a bat tested at the Vermont Department of Health Laboratory.

Bats that have bitten or scratched a person should be caught and submitted for rabies testing. Because a bat bite or scratch may be small and hard to see, bats found in a room with an unattended child or in a room with a soundly sleeping person should also be tested.

To capture a bat safely, wait until the bat lands. Approach it slowly while wearing leather work 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 so the bat can breathe.

“Bats are an important part of the ecosystem but they should be appreciated at a distance, since they have been implicated in human rabies cases,” said Dr. Robert Johnson, state public health veterinarian for the Vermont Department of Health.

Each year, the Health Department tests approximately 100 bats for rabies, and one or two are routinely identified as positive. Rabies is a viral disease found mainly in wildlife (especially raccoons, foxes, bats and skunks). A total of 71 animals tested positive for rabies in Vermont in 2009, and 19 so far in 2010. The test for rabies is done on a tissue sample from the animal’s brain so the animal must be euthanized in order to be tested.

Rabies can also affect domestic animals and people. The virus is typically contracted through the bite or scratch of an infected animal.

People who may have been exposed to rabies should contact their healthcare provider. If there is an obvious bite or scratch, the wound should be washed thoroughly with soap and warm water as soon as possible. Untreated, rabies is always fatal; however, prompt treatment with rabies shots after an exposure is very effective in preventing illness in people. There has never been a human case of rabies reported to the Vermont Department of Health.

The best way to protect domestic animals is to have them vaccinated against rabies before an exposure occurs.

For more information and the number of animal rabies cases reported each year, visit [healthvermont.gov](http://healthvermont.gov).

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