

Animal Health Advisory: First Rabid Bat of 2023 in LA County Identified 4.4.2023

Key Points

- Public Health has identified the first rabid bat of 2023 in LA County.
- Bats remain the primary reservoir species for rabies in LA County.
- Bats are an essential part of the ecosystem and it is illegal to keep, injure, or kill bats.
- Any bat that could have bitten or had exposure to a pet or human should not be discarded or released. Animal Control should be contacted immediately to arrange for rabies testing on the bat.
- Veterinary staff should familiarize themselves and clients on what to do if a bat is found.
- Pets should be kept up to date on rabies vaccinations and owners should take precautions to avoid attracting wildlife on their property.

Dear Colleague,

On March 29, 2023, Public Health confirmed the first rabid bat of the year in LA County. The bat was found on an outdoor wall of a home in Santa Clarita.

Bats continue to be the main rabies reservoir species in LA County. LA County has also reported the highest number of rabid bats every year for over the last decade compared to other counties in California. Bats are considered protected wildlife and play a vital role in the ecosystem by eating insects, pollinating plants, and spreading seeds. It is illegal to keep, injure, or kill bats.

While only a small percentage (~1%) of bats in nature have rabies, up to 20% of the bats reported to, and tested, by LA County Public Health have been rabies positive.

It is crucial that any bat found indoors in a home, or in areas where people or pets may have had direct contact, are **not** discarded or released. Any bat in this scenario should be reported to local animal control so the bat can be retrieved and tested for rabies by either containing the bat in a room if indoors or covering it with a bucket until animal control arrives. This is because bats have tiny teeth, and a bite or scratch from a tooth may not leave a lasting mark but may still transmit rabies. Exposure risk to humans and pets can be ruled out if a found bat tests negative for rabies. Rabies testing of the bat is performed at no cost to the resident. If the bat is released or discarded, the opportunity to test it is lost, and it must be assumed to have been rabid for safety's sake. People who had potential exposure to either a confirmed rabid bat, or a **bat that was not tested**, typically need to receive rabies post-exposure prophylaxis, which consists of a series of injections given over 2 weeks. Pets in these scenarios need to be vaccinated and quarantined for prolonged periods (1 month if up-to-date on rabies vaccination and 6 months if not).

The only rabies variants (strains of the virus) currently known to exist in LA County are all associated with bats. However, bat rabies variants can be transmitted from bats to other wildlife, and then to people or pets. This is called viral spillover. Therefore, pet and human encounters with skunks, coyotes, foxes, and opossums still pose a rabies risk unless the wild animal can be captured and tests negative for rabies.

Veterinarians are encouraged to take the following actions:

- All dogs and cats (*including indoor-only cats*) should be kept up to date on rabies vaccinations.
- All pet encounters with bats should be reported to Veterinary Public Health. Bat bites are tiny and often leave no lasting mark. Therefore, if the pet had any potential direct or unsupervised access to a bat, it should be reported.
- Bites from other wildlife should be reported to Veterinary Public Health as well.
- Pet owners should be advised not to leave food or water outside that would attract wildlife.
- Pet owners and staff should be advised not to handle or try to rehabilitate sick bats.
- Pet owners should be advised to not release a bat if it is found indoors, because it may have bitten people and pets while indoors and exposed them to rabies. It needs to be tested for rabies. They should call animal control to arrange testing it for rabies.
- Veterinary staff should read the following information and educate pet owners on what to do if a bat is found:
http://ph.lacounty.gov/vet/docs/WhatToDoIfYouFindABat_2021Outreach.pdf

Anyone who has questions regarding rabies can call or email the Veterinary Public Health Program at (213) 288-7060; vet@ph.lacounty.gov.

Sincerely,

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Please email vet@ph.lacounty.gov if you wish to unsubscribe or need other AHAN-related assistance. To sign up for future Animal Health Alerts or to view previously released AHANs, please visit <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/vet/AHAN.htm>.
