

LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

VETERINARY PUBLIC HEALTH AND RABIES CONTROL



Bat Advisory

Most recent human rabies cases in the United States have been caused by rabies viruses from bats. In the USA, there are usually only 1-2 human cases of rabies per year. Among the 19 naturally acquired cases of rabies in humans in the USA from 1997-2006, 17 were associated with bats.

Many people who died of bat rabies were not aware that bats can have rabies and transmit it through a bite, and so did not seek medical attention. Also bats have very small teeth which may leave marks that disappear quickly. In other cases, it appears possible that young children may not fully awaken due to the presence of a bat (or its bite) or may not report a bite to their parents.

The Public Health Department collects sick and dead bats as part of its rabies surveillance program with the assistance of local animal control agencies. The bats are tested for rabies in the County Public Health Laboratory. Only dead and sick bats are collected for rabies surveillance. Of these bats, about one in ten is rabid. Rabies can be confirmed only in a laboratory.

However, any bat that is active by day, is found in a place where bats are not usually seen (for example, in a room in your home or on the lawn), or is unable to fly, is far more likely than others to be rabid. Such bats are often the most easily approached. Therefore, it is best never to handle any bat.

Handling Bats

People should not pick up, or otherwise directly touch bats, especially those found on the ground as these are more likely to have rabies.

If a person awakens to find a bat on them or close to them, the animal should be tested for rabies. If it tests positive, or is not available for testing, then it would have to be assumed that the bat may have had rabies and post-exposure prophylaxis should be initiated without delay.

- Immediately contact your physician or the public health department for advice.
- Without delay contact your local animal control agency if you find a bat on the ground or loose in your home and they will pick it up for testing. It is okay to contain a bat that is sick or flying inside a home until an animal control officer arrives.

Bats are protected by law. Bats should not be disturbed or captured, unless they present a potential public health risk. Bats roosting in attics or caves should not be disturbed and may not be killed. If bats colonize a building, professional help is probably needed to remove them properly and humanely. The bats may only be excluded from the building when there are no babies in the roost (late fall, winter).