

Stay away from bats!

Bats in Utah often use building structures as a place to rest or find safety. Every year, the Utah Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) gets reports of bat exposures in cabins at camp facilities. Because bats are the most common source for rabies in Utah, it is important for camp facilities and camp directors to better understand the risk of rabies and what to do when you find a bat on camp grounds.

Rabies is a viral disease that affects the nervous system, and infection is nearly always fatal after symptoms appear. If someone is exposed to rabies through a bite or scratch from a rabid animal, they can get [medication](#) to stop them from getting the infection. The medication only works if you get it before symptoms start.

Rabid bats may look and act normal, or may show signs of illness including being active during the day (which is abnormal for bats) or laying on the ground, unable to fly. A bite or scratch from a bat may not always be visible. If someone sleeps in the same room as a bat they could be bitten or scratched and not know it. The most important thing to do if you find a bat on the ground or inside a camp facility building is to not touch, pet, feed, or try to catch the bat. In addition, people and pets should never sleep in the same room as a bat.

Bats in cabins can result in large numbers of campers and staff being referred for rabies postexposure prophylaxis (PEP). This includes extensive risk assessments and investigations conducted by local and state health departments, as well as costly medicines. Fortunately, these circumstances can be prevented if camp facilities and camp directors take the following safety measures:

Camp facilities:

- 1) Managers of camp facilities should routinely inspect all cabins and buildings to make sure bats are not roosting in these enclosures.
 - a) Attic: Examine both sides of each rafter and ceiling joist.
 - b) Crawl space: Examine both sides of each floor joist and the entire foundation.
 - c) Exterior: Examine for points of entry. This may require examining the building at night to see if bats leave any part of the structure.
- 2) If bats are found, DO NOT let campers or staff work or sleep in the building. Contact your [local Division of Wildlife](#) (DWR) to safely get the bats out of the structure.
- 3) Repair or modify camp buildings to keep bats and other animals out. Make sure all small openings are identified and sealed or constructed to prevent entry of bats—bats can fit through an opening as small as 3/8". Examples of bat entry points are:
 - a) Soffit and ridgeline vents
 - b) Sewer-line vents that penetrate the roof
 - c) Electrical conduit entry points

- d) Crawl space vents
 - e) Loose door and window seals and frames
 - f) Chimneys and chimney caps
- 4) Don't allow occupancy of buildings until they are bat-proof and free of unwanted bats.

Camp leaders:

- 1) Encourage campers to tell an adult immediately if they see a bat on the ground or inside a camp building.
- 2) If a bat is found on the ground or inside the building, make sure nobody touches the bat and nobody enters the area of the building the bat has access to.
- 3) If a bat is found inside a cabin used for sleeping, don't sleep in the cabin.
- 4) Encourage campers to tell an adult immediately if they come into contact with a bat.
- 5) If someone is bitten or scratched by a bat, seek medical treatment immediately, and notify your [local health department](#) to report the exposure and discuss next steps. Confirm whether other campers or staff came into contact with the bat.
- 6) Contact the camp facilities' manager so they can follow-up with DWR to safely get rid of the bats.
- 7) If the bat cannot be captured by a professional, follow [CDC's guidelines](#) for how to safely capture a bat. If a person or pet has been clearly exposed to a bat, and it is still in the area, it is useful to collect the bat for rabies testing. A *negative* test result can help prevent costly rabies treatment or pet quarantines. Contact your local health department to coordinate rabies testing at the Utah Public Health Laboratory. If there was no bat exposure to anyone or any pet, you can safely release the bat in the wild.

Visit rabies.utah.gov for more information.
Email onehealth@utah.gov if you have any questions.