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# Bats and Rabies

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Bats are remarkable creatures, often misunderstood and feared. Contrary to popular belief, they are not flying rodents. They are more closely related to primates (humans and monkeys) than they are to mice and rats. Seventeen different species of bats live in Canada, and of these, the most common bats are the Little Brown Bat, and the Big Brown Bat (common to Elgin County). The Little Brown Bat has a body weight of only 8 g (3 oz) and has a wingspan of 22 cm (9"), while the Big Brown Bat can weigh up to 20 g (7/10 oz) and has a wingspan of 35 cm (14").

Bats are the only mammals that are capable of flight, though they do not have wings. They glide on air using folds of skin stretched between their elongated finger bones, and the sides of their bodies and tails. Their flight patterns often appear clumsy and erratic, though they are very agile in the air. Bats living in Canada eat only insects that they catch in flight. Bats can consume 60% of their body weight in insects every evening. The insects that a bat consumes are mosquitoes (up to 600 per hour), moths, midges, beetles and other insects.

## Do bats present health hazards?

Yes. Bats, like any other warm-blooded animal may be infected with the rabies viruses and are capable of transmitting the virus. The rabies virus can be passed onto humans by being bitten by an infected bat. Finding a bat on the ground, in an unusual place or flying during the day means it may be injured or suffering from an infectious disease such as rabies.

## How do you define contact?

The bat must have direct contact with a human. Direct contact means the bat has been observed to touch or land on a person. ALL CONTACTS WITH A BAT ARE TO BE REPORTED TO PUBLIC HEALTH.

## What if a human comes into contact with a bat?

All human contacts with a bat must be assessed for risk of rabies as soon as possible. If there is a visible mark, wash the area thoroughly with soap and water. Call your physician or visit your emergency department. A physician will assess your need for rabies vaccine and contact the Health Unit. Testing of the bat (by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency) for rabies infection can eliminate the need for rabies vaccine.

## **How do I discard a grounded bat?**

***If there has been no human contact***, use heavy leather gloves and a scoop to handle the bat. A bat may be disposed of in household garbage or in a hole in the ground. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after discarding the bat.

## **How can a bat get into my home?**

An infestation begins with just one bat. Bats do not just fly into a home, they require an attractant, and that attractant is usually insects flying around illuminated swimming pools, street lights, and flood and door lamps on the sides of homes. When near a building, openings are often detected by air movements from that opening. If this opening provides access to a good roosting area, then the bat will spend time there, constantly defecating and urinating. The smell from the feces (guano) and urine then attracts other bats, and a colony will form. Colonies may range from one or two bats to several thousand. From their roosting place, they may find other ways of getting out of the building, or further into it, such as into a bedroom or living room.

## **Where do I find the holes that bats use to get in?**

Any crack or opening greater than 0.95 cm (3/8") is sufficient for entrance. Openings may be found along roof edges, eaves, gables, chimneys, attic and roof vents, under loose fitting doors, broken windows, conduits, flashing, loose shingles, poorly fitting fascia and soffits, and dormers to name a few.

## **Can a bat colony damage my home?**

Yes. Bats will not chew wood, wires, or siding, however, they are capable of creating other problems, mostly with their guano and urine. Wooden beams and joists become prone to deterioration after prolonged exposure to large amounts of bat urine. This may weaken the structure of the building and create safety hazards. Extremely large amounts of guano have caused ceilings to collapse in older structures. Bat urine and guano produces a very unpleasant odour that attracts other pests, such as insects. Consequently, a secondary infestation may result.

## **How do I know if I have bats in my home?**

High numbers of bats around your property may warrant an inspection of your home. There are numerous signs of a bat infestation apart from visual sightings inside the home. Look for rub marks around areas that have cracks and holes. The marks will be around entrance ways which usually have smooth surfaces (aluminum or vinyl siding). The rub marks are created by an oily substance in the bat's fur and indicates heavy use. Bat entrances are often marked by feces on the wall or just below the entrance. Look for fecal droppings in the attic or crawl spaces of your home. Bat droppings are distinguished from mouse droppings by their ability to be crushed between the fingers. Bats are noisy on hot days and these noises can be heard by the house occupants. Noises may come from the attic, wall void or from inside the chimney. It

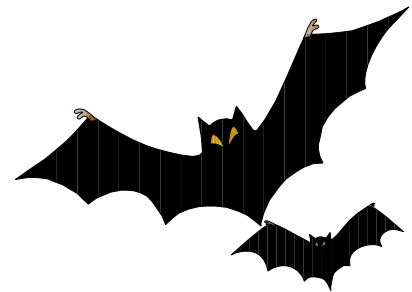
is important to remember that noises in the chimney may also be created by birds or raccoons. Boards and beams that have been saturated with urine soon become whitish and powdery because the urine crystalizes. These crystals may accumulate and form stalactites and stalagmites. This occurs with heavy infestations.

### **How long will bats live in my home?**

Bats will live in your home for as long as you let them. Remember this fact: Bats can live for 30 or more years, and numerous generations can be found in one colony. Bats will migrate, but if conditions in your home provide an ideal living space, they may remain year round.

### **How can I prevent bats from entering my home?**

This is done by patching holes and cracks, fitting screens on windows, fitting weather-stripping or sweeps to doors, and filling spaces between sections of fascia, soffits and siding. Repairs should be done during the cooler months of the year when the bats leave for the winter and NOT when they are nursing young (usually from April to mid-May) otherwise the young will die and create secondary odour and insect problems. Remember, when bats leave for the winter, they will return to the same place the following year, if they leave at all.



**For more information call your doctor or contact:**

*Health Protection Department*  
(519) 631-9900