Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 2008

What to Do if You Find a Bat In Your Home

In Massachusetts, bats may be found in houses or apartments, particularly during the late summer. If any person or pet may have had contact with the bat, it will be necessary to capture the bat and have it tested for rabies.

Bats sometimes carry rabies and may spread it to people or animals if they bite or scratch them. Fortunately, if a person is exposed to rabies, they can be treated to prevent them from getting the disease. Only 5% of bats submitted to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health for testing are rabid. This means that most of the time, treatment is not necessary **when the bat is available for testing**.

If you find a bat in your home, follow these simple steps:

1. First, figure out if a person or pet may have **had direct contact with the bat.** Contact is considered to be a bite, scratch or other physical contact. If contact occurred, immediately wash the affected area thoroughly with soap and water, seek medical attention for people and/or pets and contact your local health department.
2. If direct contact did not occur, **determine if contact was possible.** The possibility of contact exists if a bat was close to an unattended child, a person who was sleeping, a person with sensory or mental impairment, or a pet.
3. **If direct contact or possible contact occurred, capture the bat without touching it and without damaging its head.** (The brain is needed for rabies testing. Avoid actions such as crushing the head or swatting a bat with a tennis racket; it could damage the brain and make it impossible to test.) Refer to the document "Capturing a Bat: What You Need and How to Do It."
4. **If you are certain there was no possibility of contact** between the bat and any human or pet, the bat can be allowed to leave on its own, or if already captured, it can be released.
5. **To allow a bat to leave a home,** close the room and closet doors, open windows, turn on a light (if the room is dim) and observe the bat until it leaves. Be sure to close the windows once the bat has left.
6. **To release a captured bat,** take the container outdoors and wearing gloves (heavy, preferably pliable thick leather) remove the lid to allow the bat to fly away.

Your local board of health or the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Division of Epidemiology and Immunization (617-983-6800, available 24/7) can help you determine if the bat should be tested.

Text Adapted with Permission of the New York State Department of Health