

Prevention of Rabies in Humans:

Prevention of Bat Exposure at Summer Camps

Summer camps provide children wonderful educational opportunities, but in some circumstances may pose a risk for exposure to wildlife and their diseases. Rabies is a disease that, while rare in humans, is almost invariably fatal. Several wild mammals in North Carolina may be infected with rabies, particularly bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes, beaver, groundhogs as well as bobcats, coyotes and other large carnivores. Domestic mammals, including cats, dogs and livestock may also be infected with rabies.

Exposures to bats are implicated in about one to two human deaths due to rabies in the United States each year. Rabies is transmitted through direct contact with a rabid bat, through a bite or scratch from a rabid animal, or if saliva from a rabid animal comes in contact with a mucous membrane or open wound. Unrecognized exposures to bats are a concern and may occur when persons in the same room as a bat are unaware that a bite or direct contact has occurred (e.g., a sleeping person awakens to find a bat in the room, or an adult witnesses a bat in the room with a previously unattended child or mentally disabled or inebriated person). Bat bites are practically undetectable after just a few hours.

Finding a bat in a cabin can result in large numbers of campers and staff being referred for rabies postexposure prophylaxis with extensive risk assessments and investigations conducted by local and state health departments. Fortunately, these circumstances can be prevented if local health departments and camp directors take the following safety measures.

Prior to the opening of camps:

Local health department:

- Contact summer camp directors in your jurisdiction *before the camp is occupied* to provide educational information about prevention of wildlife exposures and resources to begin [bat-proofing and wildlife-proofing](#) camp facilities.
- Assist camp directors in developing protocol and educational materials about prevention of bat and wildlife exposures for both staff and campers. Education of staff and campers should occur at the beginning of each session and include: prevention of animal exposures, actions to take if wildlife is witnessed in camp facilities or on camp grounds and what to do if an animal bite or exposure does occur.

Camp Director:

- Begin safety measures to [bat-proof and wildlife-proof](#) facilities early, before the camp opens. Inspect facilities prior to use and on a daily basis. Eliminate potential wildlife entry points into buildings to ensure that bats and other wildlife are not present. Hire a Wildlife Control Agent for professional inspection of facilities and exclusion of any bats and wildlife present in the buildings.
- Train staff about rabies prevention measures. Instruct campers not to approach, touch, feed, capture or rehabilitate wild or stray animals, and to report wild or stray animals in or around buildings to camp officials.
- Camp dogs, cats and livestock should have current veterinary health examinations to ensure they are free of internal and external parasites and infectious disease and have current rabies vaccinations if there is potential for human contact (rabies vaccination

certificate should be on file). USDA licensed rabies vaccinations are available for dogs, cats, ferrets, horses, sheep and cattle.

- Keep contact information for local and state health departments and animal control current and accessible.

If an animal bite, scratch or other exposure occurs, take IMMEDIATE action:

- Wash the victim's wounds thoroughly with soap and running water for 15 minutes. Seek medical attention.
- Contact local animal control to capture the exposing animal, confine it, or have it tested (species- dependent).
- Report the exposure to the local health department communicable disease nurses, who will then provide rabies risk assessments of exposed individuals and public health recommendations.

Helpful Resources: Prevention of Rabies Transmission from Bats and Wild Mammals

1. Where can I find information on rabies prevention and control in North Carolina?

The NC Rabies Control Manual is located at <http://epi.publichealth.nc.gov/cd/lhds/manuals/rabies/toc.html> and the NC Division of Public Health website on Rabies at <http://epi.publichealth.nc.gov/cd/diseases/vph.html>.

2. Where can I find specific guidance on bat-proofing buildings at camps?

BATS: Safety and Risk Management at Camp
http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/pdf/bats_final_508.pdf

3. Where can I find a list of professional Wildlife Control Agents (professionals that exclude bats and wildlife) for hire in my county?

See the Wildlife Resources Commission website: Contact a wildlife damage control agent <https://www.ncwildlife.org/Trapping/Wildlife-Control-Agent>

4. Where can I find information about medical care I should receive after an animal bite or rabies exposure?

CDC: Wound Care and Rabies Postexposure Prophylaxis
http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/medical_care/index.html.

5. Where can I find more information on bats and rabies?

CDC: Bats and Rabies <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/bats/index.html>, to limit the risk of exposure to rabies.

6. Where can I find North Carolina rabies statistics? NC Division of Public Health: Rabies Facts and Figures <http://epi.publichealth.nc.gov/cd/rabies/figures.html>

7. Who do I call for assistance with rabies questions in North Carolina?

NC Division of Public Health, Communicable Disease Branch Contacts - 919-733-3419 Rabies On Call Consultation (24/7).