



NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

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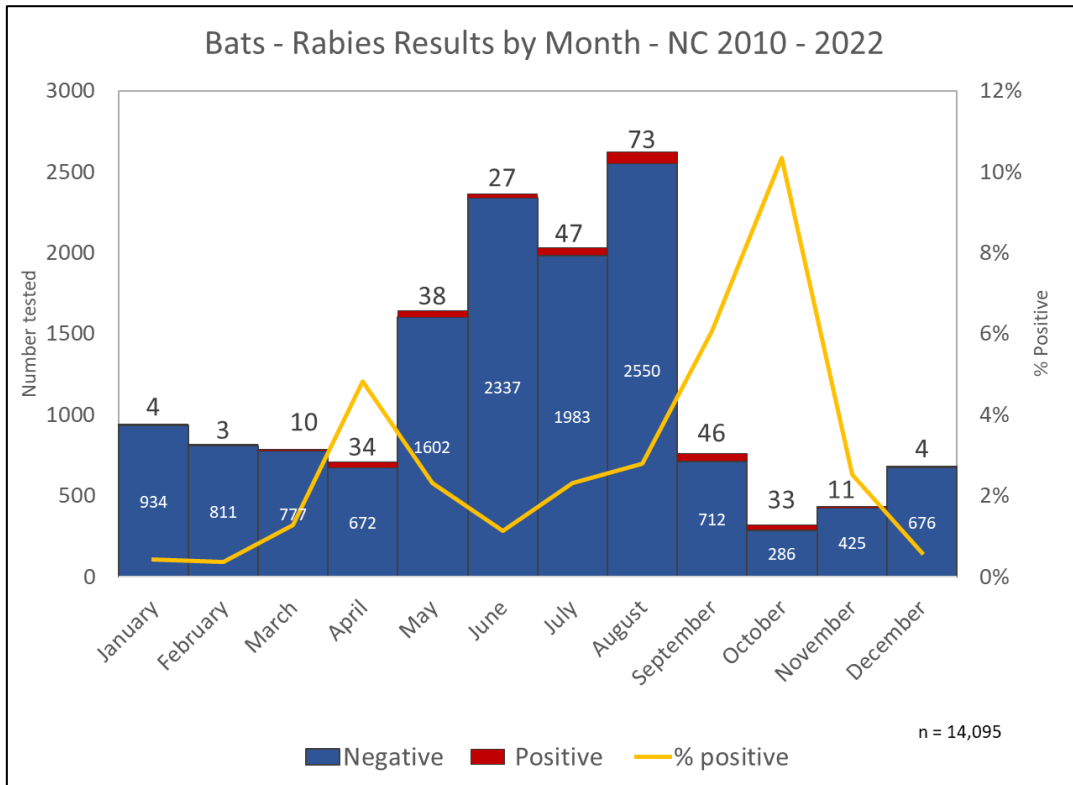
Date: 17 July 2024
 To: North Carolina Local Health Departments
 From: Erica Wilson, MD, Medical Epidemiologist
 Subject: Submission of Multiple Bats for Rabies Testing

Introduction

While human rabies in the United States is rare, exposures to rabies is common. The CDC estimates over 60,000 people receive rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) each year. Many of these incidents of PEP administration are due to bat exposure.

Each summer the number of bat specimens submitted to the NC State Laboratory of Public Health (NCSLPH) increases greatly, as shown by the graph on this page. At the same time, the number of submissions involving multiple bats from a single address or dwelling also greatly increases.

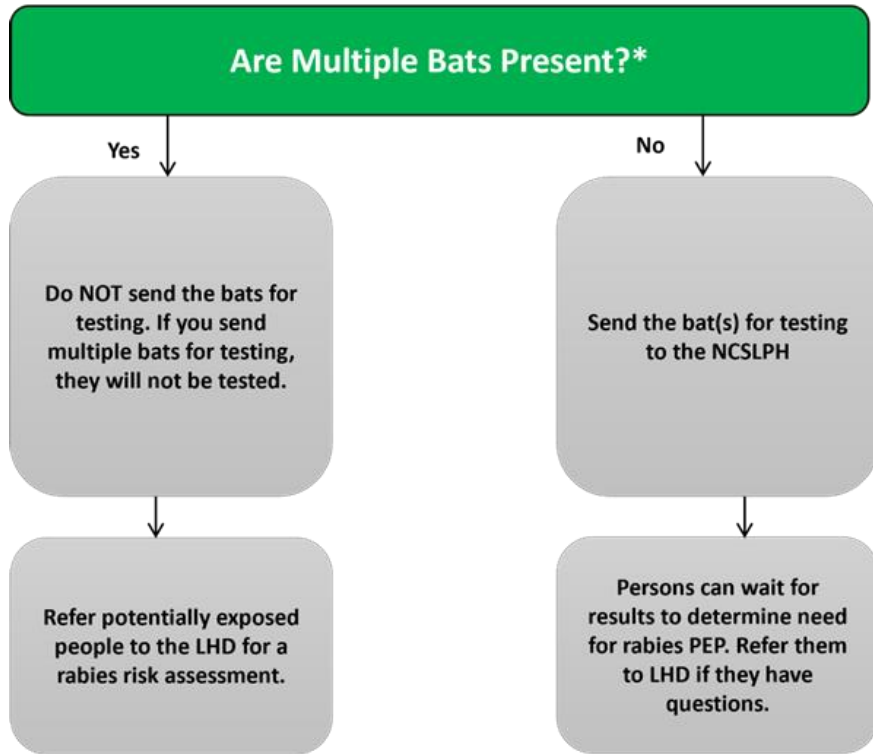
Submission of multiple bats should be avoided. Finding multiple bats in a single address is indicative of the presence of a colony. It is very likely that some bats that exposed people will be missed. Thus, decisions about PEP should not be based on testing of any of the bats. If you have any questions about risk management and when to test for rabies, please feel free to call the epidemiology on call line at 919-733-3419.



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Management of Multiple Bats at a Single Address



Why should multiple bats not be tested?

Bats generally become more active in the spring and summer, and they often form maternity colonies in structures to raise their young. Their increased activity often leads them into conflict with people in indoor living working spaces. It is important to understand that when multiple bats are witnessed, it is almost certain there are others present but not seen. As such, when collecting bats in these situations, you are only seeing or collecting a subset of the total bats likely present.

While it is important to rule out rabies in bats exposed to people, in many cases it is not possible if multiple bats are present at the same location. Rabies testing of animals is performed to provide **definitive guidance** on whether PEP is necessary for a human, or control measures are indicated for a dog, cat or ferret. If multiple bats are present at a single address, they would all have to be tested to provide a definitive answer.

If multiple bats are found at a single address, do not submit them. An incorrect decision that is based upon testing only a subset of bats may result in a potential rabies exposure that is not treated.

* Multiple bats could include either of the following: 1) Three or more bats found at the same address on the same date, or 2) Three or more bats found at the same address over the course of several months.