

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 at schools. Because bats are the most common source for rabies in Utah, it is important for school districts and students to better understand the risk of rabies and what to do when you find a bat on school 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 they get it before symptoms start.

Rabid bats may look and act normal or may show signs of illness. Signs of illness include 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. The most important thing to do if you find a bat on school grounds, 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.

Bat exposures in school facilities can result in a lot of students and staff being recommended to get 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 students and staff take the following safety measures:

- 1) Teach students to never touch a bat.
- 2) Encourage students to tell a teacher or adult immediately if they see a bat on the ground or flying around inside a building.
- 3) Encourage students to tell a teacher or adult immediately if they come into contact with a bat. A potential exposure includes a bite or scratch from a bat as well as if saliva from the bat enters an open wound.
- 4) 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 students or staff came into contact with the bat.
- 5) Close-off the area where bats are reported to make sure more students or staff are not exposed.
- 6) Contact your [local animal control](#) or [Division of Wildlife Resources](#) to safely remove the bat from the premises.
- 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 exposed to a bat and the bat 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. Contact your [local health department](#) to coordinate rabies testing at the

Utah Public Health Laboratory. If no one was exposed to the bat, the bat can be safely released into the wild.

- 8) If a bat colony or larger bat infestation is reported, additional steps will need to be taken to make sure all bats are removed safely, and make sure more bats cannot enter the building. These steps may include hiring a private pest management company. Discuss these steps with your local Division of Wildlife Resources representative.

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