

Bat contact and rabies risks



Information for Health Professionals

If a patient presents themselves following a bat contact incident in the UK or worldwide, you must ensure a risk assessment is carried out and they are given appropriate post-exposure treatment. Bat bites, especially in the UK, are often felt and not seen. They usually do not leave a mark and may not bleed; therefore the history of the exposure is more important than the physical examination. Scratches and bat saliva on open wounds or mucous membranes also constitute an exposure.

For specialist advice, support on completing the rabies risk assessment and provision of free rabies vaccine for post-exposure treatment, please contact:

UKHSA's Rabies and immunoglobulin service (RIGS)

The RIGS service can be contacted on 0330 128 1020; or your local health protection team – see www.gov.uk/health-protection-team for contact details.

Further information

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/conditions/rabies

The Green Book

www.gov.uk/government/publications/rabies-the-green-book-chapter-27

UK Health Security Agency

www.gov.uk/government/collections/rabies-risk-assessment-post-exposure-treatment-management

What treatment is required after contact with a bat?

Anyone in direct contact with a bat should be assessed by a health professional to ensure they receive appropriate post-exposure treatment.

Please take this leaflet with you as it has useful information for your health care professional.

Post-exposure treatment involves vaccine against rabies virus:

- four doses of vaccine given over 21 days is needed if you have never had rabies vaccine before
- a shorter course may be given if you have had previous rabies vaccines
- if the bat exposure happened abroad, additional treatment may be needed



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What are the risks from contact with a bat?

Bats, like any wild animal, can carry a number of different viruses and bacteria, some of which can cause illness in people. One of these diseases is rabies, which can be passed on to humans through a bat bite, scratch or contact with the bat's saliva. Bat rabies (also known as bat lyssavirus) can be found in many countries around the world, **including the UK**.

Rabies, although rarely contracted from bats, can be fatal in humans once symptoms appear. However, prompt treatment with rabies vaccine after an exposure is effective at preventing the disease. **All bat bites, scratches or other exposures, whether in the UK or abroad, should be assessed promptly by a health professional** so they can arrange post-exposure treatment if needed.

What should I do if I find a bat?

Infected bats may not show signs of illness, therefore all bats should be considered a potential risk of rabies.

- Don't touch a bat (alive or dead) with your bare hands
- If you have to touch a bat, always wear thick gloves
- If you need to contain a bat to move it, cover the bat with a small box, such as a plastic tub, with air holes and then slide a sheet of card under the box
- If you find a bat in your home, don't attempt to catch it while it is flying. Open a window to the outside as wide as possible, dim the lights and close the door leaving the bat alone in the room. A bat will usually fly out on its own
- If your pet catches a bat, handle the bat safely as explained above and then keep your pet under observation. Contact your vet immediately if your pet falls sick or starts behaving unusually

Contact the Bat Conservation Trust

on 0345 1300 228 for more advice

about contained or injured bats



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What should I do if I come into contact with a bat?

Bat bites are often **felt and not seen**, and may not bleed or leave an obvious mark on the skin. Scratches or contact with bat saliva may also pose a risk.

After contact with a bat, it is important to:

- wash the area of any bites or scratches with soap and water immediately
- contact a health professional promptly so that they can assess the exposure and arrange post-exposure treatment. Even if you have had rabies vaccine before, it is still important to seek medical advice
- if the exposure happens abroad, seek medical attention locally – do not wait until you return to the UK

Sometimes it might not always be clear if someone has been bitten by a bat, for example a bat found in the room of a child. In these cases, speak to a health professional and they can assess if post-exposure treatment is needed.