

For Immediate Release | May 10, 2022

What you need to know about bats

IH Wide – As more people head outdoors across Interior Health, it is likely they may encounter bats. Bats can carry diseases that can be transmitted to humans. This PSA provides tips on how to avoid bat exposures and when to seek health advice.

Bats and rabies

In B.C., between four and eight per cent of bats that come into contact with people test positive for the rabies virus. In 2021, 132 people in the region were treated for potential exposure to rabies. Treatment, which involves a two-week long period of vaccinations, should be administered as soon as possible after exposure. Without treatment, rabies is almost always fatal.

It is very important that people avoid handling bats with their bare hands to prevent bites or scratches. This is particularly important for children, who tend to find bats on the ground and play with them. Anyone who has been bitten or scratched by a bat should seek medical attention immediately.

Precautions to protect yourself from contact with bats:

- Do not touch live or dead bats, talk to your children about not touching bats lying on the ground as these creatures may be potentially sick.
- Make your residence “bat proof.” Keep doors and windows closed, make sure window screens don’t have any holes and keep attic vents properly screened and openings closed.
- If you find a live bat in a room of your home, open the window and close interior doors until the bat leaves.
- Seek professional bat-control advice (from a pest control or wildlife specialist) if your home is inhabited by bats.
- Avoid locations where bats are likely to be found (e.g. caves).
- Vaccinate your pets against rabies.

If you suspect you have been bitten or scratched by a bat:

- Thoroughly wash any bite or scratch wounds with soap and water.
- Contact your local public health unit, primary care provider immediately or go to the emergency department. Although less frequently, other mammals can also carry rabies. Please consult with your health provider or emergency department if you had a close encounter with a potentially rabid animal.
- If possible, safely contain the bat to prevent others from being exposed. Keep the bat in a safe location until a trained public health official can arrange to pick it up and test it for rabies.

- 30 -