



Eric J. Holcomb
Governor

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State Health Commissioner

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Dear Residential Children's Camp:

The Indiana Department of Health (IDOH) would like to remind you of the risk of disease transmission posed to campers and staff by direct contact with wild animals, especially bats.

A small percentage of bats in Indiana are infected with the virus that causes rabies, a disease that is primarily transmitted to people through the bite of an infected animal. It is also possible for people to get rabies if saliva from a rabid animal gets into their eyes, nose, mouth, or a fresh open wound. Rabies is almost always fatal once symptoms arise. Fortunately, rabies can be prevented by giving rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (rPEP) (also known as "rabies shots") to people who have had high-risk exposures. When appropriate, rPEP should be initiated as soon as possible to prevent rabies.

Being bitten or scratched by a bat, finding a bat in the same room where someone was sleeping, or finding a bat in the same room as an unattended child are all possible rabies exposures. Most bat exposures occur when bats are found in human living spaces, including summer camp cabins. You cannot tell if a bat has rabies without conducting a laboratory test. For this reason, all bat exposures are reportable to your local health department to determine whether campers or camp staff may have been exposed to rabies. Any bat that may have exposed someone to rabies should be captured as safely as possible for testing.

Bats should be prevented from inhabiting human living spaces in order to avoid high risk exposures. If there is any evidence of bats roosting in camp locations, these locations should not be used for sleeping or camp activities until the bats can be safely excluded and the building remediated. Any opening larger than 1/4 inch (including those for electrical and plumbing) should be sealed to prevent the bats from re-entering; it is important to not seal these holes until all the bats have left (sealing bats inside a facility can increase the exposure risk to humans). Bat exclusion activities should only occur in the spring and fall to avoid disturbing hibernating bats or maternity colonies. The exact dates when it is safe to exclude bats are dependent on the species of bat and the geographic location where your camp is located. A [wildlife control operator](#) can help you decide on these dates.

The IDOH recommends that all camps hold a safety briefing at the start of each camp session to educate staff and campers on excluding and avoiding bats.

To **promote**, **protect**, and **improve** the health and safety of all Hoosiers.



To reduce the risk of rabies transmission while camp is in session:

- Instruct campers and staff never to touch or feed wild or stray animals.
- Instruct campers and staff to avoid animals that appear to be sick.
- Maintain building integrity to prevent bats from entering buildings and cabins.
- Inspect buildings and cabins regularly to ensure bats are not present.
- Following a bite or scratch from a bat or other wild animal:
 - Wash wounds immediately with soap and water.
 - Report the incident immediately to the local health department or the IDOH.
- Assemble a bat-capture kit and store in a location where it can be quickly gathered if a bat is found in a camp facility. The kit should contain:
 - Leather or other heavy work gloves
 - Box, coffee can, or plastic container with a lid
 - Piece of flat cardboard
 - Net on a long pole
- Instruct staff on the proper method of catching a bat that has potentially exposed someone to rabies. To capture a bat:
 - Put on leather or other heavy work gloves.
 - Wait for the bat to roost on a wall or floor. Slowly approach the bat and cover it with the box, coffee can, or plastic container.
 - Slide the lid or cardboard between the wall and the container so the bat drops inside.
 - Once the cardboard is covering all sides of the container, lift the container and cardboard away from the wall with the bat trapped inside.
 - Secure the lid or cardboard to the container so the bat cannot escape.
 - Capture bats in hard-to-reach areas with a net on a long pole. Then bring the net down to a container and transfer the bat into the container while wearing heavy gloves.
 - Call the local health department or the IDOH for rabies risk assessment.
 - **Do not release the bat** until the rabies risk assessment has been conducted.

We encourage camps to work with their local health departments to develop a plan to reduce the risk of rabies transmission at their campsites. For consultation with the IDOH, please contact Rabies Epidemiologist Erik Ohannesian during regular business hours at **317-646-4637**. After hours, please call **317-233-1325** and follow the prompts to speak with the epidemiologist on call.

Jen Brown, DVM, MPH, DACVPM
State Public Health Veterinarian