

Bats & Rabies

What kind of bats are found in Kansas City?

Several kinds of bats live within the City and occasionally they may be found in homes and businesses. The most common is the Big Brown Bat. This species roosts in groups and can be found in vacant buildings, church steeples, attics, and spaces between walls. While they can be found in buildings all year-around, generally they spend the winter in caves. Sometimes one or more bats finds a way into the living quarters or office space of a building.

What should I do if I find a bat in my home/business?

Finding bats in homes and businesses in Kansas City is not uncommon. What you need to do depends on what the risk is that a person or pet animal may have been bitten by the bat. Bats in Kansas City can carry rabies and nationally, since 1980, almost everyone who has died of rabies in the United States got their infection from a bat. Bats with rabies also can infect other animals by biting them.

How can I tell if a bat has rabies?

You cannot tell if a bat has rabies simply by looking at it. This can only be determined in a laboratory. However, any bat that is active by day, is found in a place where bats are not usually seen (for example, in a room in your home or on the lawn), or is unable to fly is far more likely than others to have rabies.

I am certain that no person or animal was bitten by the bat. Now what?

If at all possible, confine the bat to one room and open a door or window to the outside. Turn off most of the lights in the room and try to shoo the bat outside. If that fails, you may have to cover the bat with a box, can, or jar so you can slip a cover under the opening and knock the bat into the container. Never attempt to grab a bat with your hands. If for any reason, the bat will not fly even when released, call Animal Control. The bat may be paralyzed from rabies.

What should I do if I am bitten by a bat?

First of all, don't panic. Not all bats that get into homes or businesses carry rabies.

If you are bitten by a bat, wash the area thoroughly with soap and water, and then contact your physician or go to the emergency department of your local hospital. The Health Department does not provide anti-rabies treatment. Whenever possible, the bat

should be captured and Animal Control contacted so that the bat can be examined for rabies.

Your physician may recommend anti-rabies treatment. This consists of a series of five (5) shots given in the arm over a 30 day period. In addition, you may receive a shot of "globulin" along with your first rabies vaccination. "Globulin" contains antibodies against rabies and gives protection during the time it takes for the vaccinations to take effect. Should the laboratory test come back that the bat did not have rabies, then you can stop the anti-rabies vaccinations.

If your dog or cat was bitten or may have been bitten by the bat, take the animal to your veterinarian. If your pet already had received its rabies shot, then the animal will only need a booster shot. However, if your pet was not already vaccinated against rabies, immunization cannot be started.

What happens to your unvaccinated pet will depend on whether the bat was rabid or not. If the bat did not have rabies, then your pet is fine and you should have it vaccinated. However, if the bat had rabies then the law requires either your pet be "put to sleep" or it will have to be kept for 6 months in a veterinary hospital at your expense.

Thus, it is very important to keep dogs and cats vaccinated against rabies, as often they are your first line of protection against animals with rabies.

What if I don't know if anyone or any animal was bitten by the bat?

There is no simple answer to this question. Just being in the same room with a bat does not put you in any danger from rabies.

In several situations, anti-rabies treatment is recommended. For example, you awake during the night or in the morning and find a bat in your bedroom. Or, you find a bat in a room with small, unattended children or a sleeping person. In these cases, a bite could have occurred without you or the other person realizing it. In fact, almost all of the people who have died from bat rabies in the United States had no memory of a bite, which is why they never wanted medical treatment. Bats have very small teeth and can leave wounds that are very, very difficult to notice.

On the other hand, if you came home from work or opened up your office and found a bat present, you would not need anti-rabies treatment, unless you got bit trying to get the bat outside. But, if your pet animals were in the home, they may have been bitten. In this situation don't let the bat get away and call Animal Control and your veterinarian.

What else can I do to protect myself, my family and my pets?

First of all, remember that bats are part of the urban wildlife of Kansas City, they are

protected by federal and state law, and they consume countless tons of insects each year. In short, they are very helpful animals. Bats will get along very well without you putting up a bat house for them.

It is important that you keep your home and other buildings in good repair so that bats cannot enter them. If you have bats then you need to "bat-proof" the building by blocking all openings bigger than 1/4 inch. These may be located by watching outside during the last half-hour of daylight and seeing where the bats come out. Once the bats have left for the night, you can begin sealing the entrances using boards, caulking, steel wool, or 1/4 inch mesh hardware cloth. Remember that this must be done at night or in the Fall after the bats have moved somewhere else, otherwise you will trap the bats in the building and this will lead to even more problems.

You can put bright lights in an attic where bats roost. After several days of the light, the bats probably will leave and then you can seal their entrances. Naphthalene flakes (moth crystals) can be placed in attics and between walls. Sometimes this causes the bats to leave.

Besides keeping your pet dogs and cats properly vaccinated against rabies, you need to instruct your children not to handle bats. Often children will find roosting bats or bats paralyzed by rabies and play with them. This may lead to bites that the children are unaware of or to which they pay little or no attention.

If you find bats on the ground or on a floor in a building, do not kick at it (particularly if you are bare foot or wearing sandals) or pick it up with your hands. Use a shovel, a piece of cardboard, or something similar, and sweep up the bat. If you are uncertain if anyone or an animal may have had contact with the bat, call Animal Control. Otherwise, you can put the bat in the trash.