

The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is [warning](#) the public to be on the alert for rabid bats this summer. So far this year, [more than a dozen bats have tested positive](#) for the rabies virus in the state of Illinois.

Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus that attacks the central nervous system, and is spread through the saliva of a rabid animal. Rabies is most common in bats, skunks, raccoons and foxes, but any unvaccinated mammal could be susceptible to the disease. That includes humans.

Most cases of human rabies that have occurred in the United States have been caused by exposure to bats. In Illinois, rabid bats can be found anywhere, and people should steer clear when they see one.

SOT

Dr. Patrick Masching, OSF HealthCare Emergency Physician

“The concern would be, if you have bats in your environment, in your house, is to not approach them, and to assume that they would have rabies and avoid them at all costs.”

People are usually exposed to the rabies virus when an infected animal bites them, but it could also be transmitted if the animal's saliva enters an open cut or a person's nose, mouth or eyes. Any contact with a bat is a possible hazard and should be reported.

SOT

Dr. Patrick Masching, OSF HealthCare Emergency Physician

“If there is an issue where you are in an environment and you are bitten by a bat, what you would like to do would be to call your physician or go to the nearest emergency room for evaluation. The other would be to call the local health department, and they have guidelines for testing and for treatment if they think you have been exposed to a bat that had rabies.”

Animals infected with the rabies virus often behave strangely. When it comes to bats, there are several signs to look for, including bats seen during the day, bats in a place where they normally aren't found (inside your home, on the ground, etc.), or those unable to fly.

According to the IDPH, people usually know when they have been bitten by a bat, but bats have very small teeth and the bite mark may not be easy to see.

SOT

Dr. Patrick Masching, OSF HealthCare Emergency Physician

“The best thing is they recommend if there's a bat in your environment and you're not sure if you could have been bit, would be to call the local animal control. Do not kill the bat. Do not chase the bat, and have them come and capture it for testing. If they can test the bat, they can determine if it has rabies and the subsequently either A.) have you get shots as required or B.) you can avoid the shots if that animal tests negative.”

The IDPH also recommend to let any wild animal on your property wander away. Bring children and pets indoors and alert neighbors. If the animal is acting abnormally, contact your local animal control.

SOT

Dr. Patrick Masching, OSF HealthCare Emergency Physician

“If it's your own pet, fine. Otherwise, leave it alone.”