

SAFETY ALERT

No. 24-03

BAT AWARENESS & RABIES PRECAUTIONS

December 2024

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health has reported an increase in rabies cases in bats over the past ten years. Because of this increase and since bats are commonly found in public spaces, the Health Department wants to remind the public to avoid handling wildlife, especially bats. In nature, about 1 in 100 bats are infected with rabies, but when a bat is found close to people and pets, the risk is higher, about 1 in 5 are rabid in LA County.

Rabies is an infectious viral disease that affects humans and other mammals. It is generally transmitted by being bitten or scratched by the tooth of an animal that has rabies. Any wild mammal (such as a raccoon, skunk, fox, coyote or bat) can have rabies and transmit it to people. In Los Angeles County, the only known animal to routinely be a reservoir for rabies is bats.

Recently, a bat captured at a LA Unified school site, tested positive for rabies, emphasizing the need to ensure staff is aware of what to do when they encounter bats.



Though only a small percentage of bats carry rabies, the risk of exposure is higher when bats exhibit unusual behavior, such as flying during the day, being found on the ground, or resting in visible areas. The only way to tell if a bat has rabies is by having it tested. The best way to prevent transmission of rabies is by preventing human interaction with wild animals that could be infected.

Key Information

- Rabid bats may or may not appear sick.
- Rabies is transmitted through the saliva of an infected animal, most commonly through bites or scratches from the tooth.
- Bites and scratches from a tooth from a bat can go unnoticed since they are typically small and difficult to detect.
- Rabies is a fatal disease for both humans and pets, including dogs and cats, without immediate medical treatment after exposure to the virus.

- **Never touch a bat with bare hands.** Teach students to alert a responsible adult if they encounter a bat. Immediately call the plant manager for help.
- Make sure any pets on campus are current on rabies vaccinations.

What to Do If You Find a Bat

- Bats are protected wildlife. It is illegal to harm or keep a bat.
- **Do not handle bats or any wildlife with bare hands.**
- If you find a sick or dead bat outdoors, cover it with a box or bucket and contact animal control to have it tested.
- If a bat is found indoors, do not release it. Exit the room/ area, relocate students and staff and contain it within the room by closing all doors and windows. If it is safe to do so, place a bucket or box over the bat. Immediately notify the site administrator.
- Anytime a bat is found or captured at a LA Unified site, place an emergency work order with the Facilities Pest Management Department for response.
- Contact your local [LA County Animal Control](#) agency to pick up the bat and have it tested. Getting the bat tested is extremely important. If it tests negative for rabies, the concern about risk to staff and students is eliminated. If the bat is not tested, it must be assumed to be positive for rabies for the sake of safety.
- Immediately report all potential exposures to bats and animal bites to Los Angeles County Veterinary Public Health & Rabies Control at (213) 288-7060.
- **Seek immediate medical care** if bitten by a bat or exposed to wildlife to determine if rabies post-exposure treatment is needed. Once symptoms occur, there is no cure.
- Parents, students and staff should be notified about any bat on campus that tests positive for rabies or that was not tested, and anyone who had direct contact should immediately contact their medical provider.

Key Contacts

- Veterinary Public Health: (213) 288-7060 or vet@ph.lacounty.gov
- Downey Animal Care Center (Bat Pickup): (562) 940-6898
- LA Unified Facilities Pest Management Department: (213) 745-3358

Rabies is a serious and fatal disease. Although most bats do not carry rabies, it is important to avoid direct contact to protect yourself, your family, and your pets.

For more information on rabies visit, <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/vet/rabies.htm>.

If you have questions, contact the Office of Environmental Health & Safety (OEHS) at 213-241-3199, email OEHSQuestions@lausd.net or visit <https://www.lausd.org/oehs>.