



Durham Region Health Department **FAX about...**

For Health Care Professionals



Bats and Rabies Exposure Assessments

Patients may present to clinics and emergency departments with concerns about bat encounters, particularly in August and September. During these months, young bats are old enough to fly, and bats roosting in house attics may become disoriented and enter living spaces. A clear risk assessment helps determine whether an exposure occurred and can prevent unnecessary bat testing and/or prescribing rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP).

Rabies incidence in the bat population is roughly 7% in Ontario. In Durham in 2025, four bats tested positive of the 26 submitted. In 2026 so far there has been one positive bat of 12 submitted.

In Southern Ontario, the bats most commonly found roosting in buildings are big brown bats. Bat teeth are very small, and puncture marks may be difficult to detect, may not bleed, and can disappear quickly. Their estimated tooth-puncture width is about 5.7 mm. Bats use their claws to climb and then drop from a height to begin flying; therefore, a bat that has landed must crawl to a higher elevation before it can fly again. A bat crawling on a person may feel similar in weight to a mouse, and the underside of the bat may feel rubbery against human skin.

Rabies risk assessments

- Rabies is rare in humans but is almost always fatal once symptoms develop. **Contact the Health Department whenever there has been direct contact with a bat or when contact cannot be reliably ruled out.**
- **Direct contact with a bat** is defined as contact between human skin and a live bat, including a bat touching or landing on a person, or a person touching a bat.
- Post-exposure prophylaxis and testing of the bat, if available, are recommended after direct contact between a person and a bat because it may be difficult to confirm that a bite did not occur.
- A bat found flying in a room while someone is asleep is not automatically considered an exposure. A risk assessment is needed to determine whether direct contact may have occurred.
- When a bat is found in a room with a child or an adult who cannot provide a reliable history, assess and observe for bite or scratch marks, ask whether the individual was crying or upset, and determine whether anyone reported that direct contact was made with the bat.

Non-exposure scenarios include a bat landing on thick clothing, touching the body surface of a dead bat, handling its feces, urine, or blood, a bat hissing at someone, or being in the same room as a bat with no physical contact.

over...

905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729 | durham.ca/health

If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.



Ordering rabies Post-Exposure Prophylaxis

To order rabies PEP, contact DRHD at 905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729 (ext. 4699) during regular business hours. After regular business hours (between 4:30 pm and 8:30 am), during weekends and holidays please call 1-800-372-1104 or 905-576-9991.

Requirement to report rabies exposures

To report a potential human exposure with a bat, wildlife, domestic animal or livestock please complete the [online form](#) or paper [Animal Bite/Exposure Form](#) (also available at durham.ca/hcp under Forms and Reporting), and fax it to the confidential line at 905-666-1887.

Questions about rabies risk assessments?

The Health Department is available to assist with rabies risk assessment questions. To speak with a public health inspector, please call Durham Health Connection Line at 905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729. After regular business hours including 4:30 pm and 8:30 am, weekends and holidays please call 1-800-3721104 or 905-576-9991. You can also visit the [rabies post-exposure prophylaxis](#) section of the Health Care Provider webpage at durham.ca/hcp, under Tools and Guidance Documents.

For more information on rabies in general, please visit durham.ca/rabies.

Additional resources

[Canadian Immunization Guide: Rabies Vaccines](#)

Rabies Immune Globulin training videos: [HRIG Administration](#), [rPEP Training Video](#)

August 14, 2026

905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729 | durham.ca/health

If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.

