

# Bat Safety and Risk Management at Camps

The United States is home to more than 40 varieties of bats. They eat many insects harmful to humans and agriculture, including night flying beetles and moths. However, some bats may be infected by and transmit the rabies virus. Most of the recent human rabies cases in the United States have been caused by rabies viruses associated with bats. Awareness of the facts about bats and rabies can help you protect yourself and your campers. This information may also help clear up misunderstandings about bats.

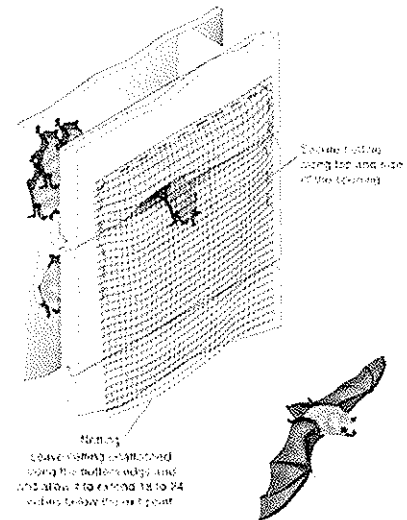
## Reduce exposure to bats

Bats are a necessary and beneficial part of our environment and common in summer camp settings. Two recommendations to reduce bat exposure when in the camp environment are to 1) bat-proof when possible, and 2) use mosquito netting.

### Bat-Proofing

Bats may use buildings as shelter from weather or from other animals. Bats can enter a building through very small spaces ( $\frac{1}{2}$  -  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch). If the camping environment has cabins or shelters that could be bat-proofed, follow these recommendations to exclude the bats.

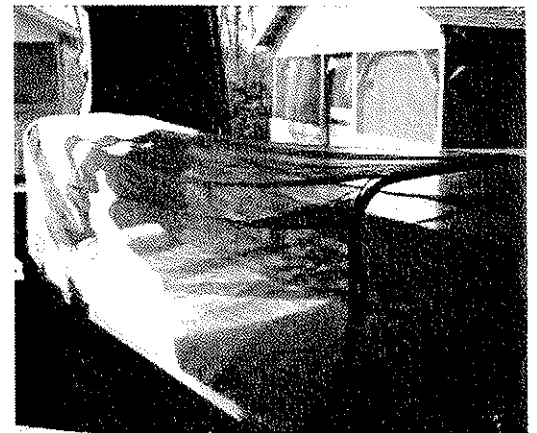
- Bat-proof only in the winter or early spring (from first frost to first thaw) as most bats leave in the fall and winter to hibernate. This will also prevent young bats that are unable to fly from being trapped inside the structure.
- Observe where the bats exit at dusk and exclude them by loosely hanging clear plastic sheeting or bird netting over these areas. Bats can crawl out and leave, but cannot re-enter (see figure).
- After the bats have been excluded, the openings can be permanently sealed.
- Fill holes with caulk, steel wool, or mesh hardware cloth.
- Keep window screens in good repair and don't leave doors open.



### Mosquito Netting

When used properly, mosquito netting will prevent exposure to both mosquitoes and bats while sleeping. The use of netting is recommended when screening is not an option.

- Mosquito netting should be elevated above the camper and cover the length of the mattress. Poles can be attached to the ends of the bed (see picture for example).
- Mosquito netting should be inspected on a regular basis to ensure it is free of holes.
- Netting should be tucked under the camper's mattress.
- At the end of the camping season, store netting in rodent-proof containers.

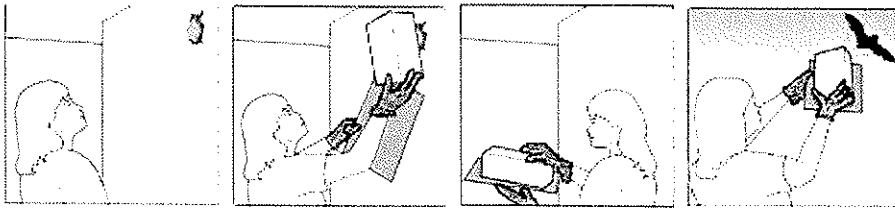


*Picture of mosquito netting over a bunk bed. Mosquito netting can be used when cabins or tents are not already screened. Picture courtesy of the Girl Scouts of the Nations Capital.*

## Removing Bats

If you are certain that the bat had no physical contact with any person or animal within the cabin or shelter, then the bat should be returned to the wild. Removing a bat from a wall or the floor is a simple process:

1. Put on leather or other suitable work gloves.
2. Take a box or plastic container and a flat piece of cardboard.
3. Wait for the bat to roost on a wall or floor.
4. Slowly approach the bat and cover it with the box.
5. Keeping the box flat against the wall, slide the cardboard between the wall and the bat.
6. Once the cardboard is visible on all sides of the box, lift both the box and the cardboard away from the wall.
7. Take the box, covered by the cardboard, outside and set it on a table or railing.
8. Remove the cardboard from the top and return to the house. The bat will fly away on its own.



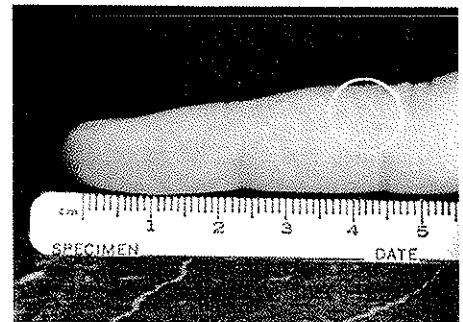
Picture courtesy of  
Bat Conservation  
International  
[www.batcon.org](http://www.batcon.org)

## What to do if a person has contact with a bat

If you or a camper are bitten by or exposed to a bat -- including saliva from a bat that gets into your eyes, nose, mouth, or a wound -- wash the affected area thoroughly and get medical advice immediately.

People usually know when they have been bitten by a bat. However, bats have small teeth which may leave marks that are not easily seen (see picture). In the following circumstances, a person should seek medical advice and have the bat tested for rabies:

- If you or a child awaken and find a bat in your room
- If you see a bat in the room of an unattended child
- If you see a bat near a person with disabilities



Picture of bat bite on finger. Picture courtesy of CDC.

In all of these circumstances, contact your local or state health department for assistance with medical advice and testing bats for rabies. To capture the bat for testing, follow the procedures above for trapping the bat, but tape the cardboard to the top of the box.

People cannot get rabies just from seeing a bat outside, in a cave, or at a distance. In addition, people cannot get rabies from having contact with bat guano (feces), blood, or urine, or from touching a bat on its fur. Despite this, bats should never be handled.

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Zoonotic Disease Program  
Bureau of Infectious Disease Control  
Ohio Department of Health  
Phone (614) 752-1029, option 2  
<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/odhPrograms/idc/zoodis/ZooMain1.aspx>



\* Credit for this document goes to CDC, Girl Scouts of the United States, and the American Camp Association.