

Changes to Submission Requirements



The Ministry of Health has made a couple of adjustments to the requirements for submitting animals for rabies testing through the Rabies Response Program.

Dr. Heather McClinchey, Veterinary Consultant with the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, issued the following statement, on March 12, 2026, addressing the changes:

- **Effective immediately, the Rabies Response Program will no longer be accepting surveillance bat samples to be sent to the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative (CWHC)** as part of the Ministry of Health’s special rabies surveillance program. The testing of bats which are not involved in potential human exposures is not recommended due to the endemicity of rabies in bats in all regions of the province. Terrestrial mammals, such as raccoons, skunks, feral cats, etc., will still be accepted by CWHC for rabies surveillance. As always, public health units should never send surveillance-only or animal-to-animal exposure samples directly to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency laboratory.




- Additionally, we would request that all health units be judicious in using the human exposure pathway for the testing of animals. Risk assessments should indicate a clear need to rule out disease before sending in animals for testing. **Animals at no/near zero risk of exposure to disease (e.g. all small rodents; animals living in confinement with no access to other animals such as indoor-only cats, small dogs, and pet rabbits with no history of a bat in the house) and those animals for whom there was no clear human exposure identified (e.g. bat-in-house), should not be sent for testing.** Our province is markedly straining federal and provincial rabies testing resources, and we want to ensure that everyone is using sound judgement before sending in samples.

Need-2-Know (N2K)

Bat Contact Guide: High Risk vs No Risk

Bats are a high-risk species for rabies anywhere in Ontario, but there are a lot of misconceptions about how easily rabies can be transmitted from a bat to another animal or a person. If in doubt, consult your veterinarian (for a pet) or your local public health unit (for a person), but here is a quick guide regarding the risks of some common kinds of bat “contact”.



	Risk to people	Risk to pets (dogs/cats)
Definite risk for rabies exposure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact with a LIVE bat on bare skin or light clothing (<i>even if you don't feel a bite</i>), including a bat in flight Having a bat tangled up in your hair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pet with live bat in its mouth Pet pawing a bat or knocking it out of the air (<i>even if you don't find a bite</i>) Pet playing with a freshly dead bat (<i>likely killed by pet</i>)
High risk for rabies exposure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young child or person with cognitive impairment asleep in the same room as a live bat (<i>must assess risk of direct contact – not an automatic exposure</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Live bat found with blood or holes in wings in a house with pets (<i>likely played with by pet</i>) Live bat or freshly dead bat found on the floor in house with pets (<i>likely played with by pet</i>) Freshly dead bat left by door where cats typically leave other small animals they've hunted (<i>likely killed by cat</i>)



NOT a Risk for Rabies Exposure!



- Adult / teenager **waking up in a room with a live bat** flying around or roosting
 - In general, a sleeping person will notice if a bat lands on their bare skin! If there is no contact, then there cannot be a bite.
- **Being in the same house as a live bat** (with no evidence of direct contact)
 - This applies to humans and pets – there is no risk unless there is evidence of direct contact with the bat, even if the bat was around for days.
- Being licked by / scratched by claws of / touching a pet **right after it has had a bat in its mouth** (risk from bacteria but not from rabies virus)
- Controlled **contact with a dead bat**
 - Rabies virus is not present on the outside of a rabid bat, it is only in its saliva and in the brain, so touching a dead bat (other than the mouth) or carefully picking up a dead bat - *even with bare hands, even if you have a hang nail* - is not a risk.
 - Dog / cat picking up or playing with a bat that was clearly already dead (e.g. dry and stiff, or mushy and smelly).
- Being **hissed at by a bat**
 - Bats do not spit or project their saliva any significant distance.