

# Pike County Health Department

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**Across Illinois**

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The Pike County Health Department is warning residents to avoid contact with bats. Contact with bats or their surroundings can cause serious health issues in humans.

## **RABIES:**

According to the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), "Perhaps the greatest health risk from bats is rabies. In Illinois, rabies is found in bats more than any other wildlife species." Just this year, the IDPH has had 46 cases of rabies reported in bats in Illinois. In Missouri, the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services reports 15 cases this year, 12 of which were from bats.

Rabies is a virus that causes encephalitis (swelling of the brain) and can be fatal unless treatment is started as soon as possible after an exposure. Humans can become infected if bitten by a rabid bat or if an infected bat's saliva comes in contact with a person's eye, nose, mouth, or open area in the skin such as a scratch or wound. Contact with aerosolized bat saliva, especially where large numbers of bats are roosting, can also transmit rabies to humans, although rare.

If a bat bites or has physical contact with a person, the wound or contact area should be washed immediately with soap and water. Unfortunately, bat bites and scratches are small and may go unnoticed. These situations occur when a bat is found in the same room with a sleeping person, infant or young child, persons with diminished sensory or mental capacity, or persons under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Whenever a bat has physical contact with a person, or is suspected of coming in contact with a person, the bat should be captured, if possible, and the incident should be reported immediately to a physician and local health authority (such as your local health department) to assess the need for rabies treatment.

Symptoms of rabies in humans may be flu-like and progress to anxiety, confusion, agitation, insomnia, hallucinations, delirium, and other abnormal behavior.

## **HISTOPLASMOSIS:**

Another disease associated with bats is **Histoplasmosis**. According to the Mayo Clinic, “Histoplasmosis is an infection caused by breathing in spores of a fungus often found in bird and bat droppings. Histoplasmosis is most commonly transmitted when these spores become airborne, often during cleanup or demolition projects.

Soil contaminated by bird or bat droppings also can transmit histoplasmosis, so farmers and landscapers are at a higher risk of contracting the disease. In the United States, histoplasmosis commonly occurs in the Mississippi and Ohio river valleys, though it can occur in other areas, too.

Most people with histoplasmosis never develop symptoms and aren't aware they're infected. But for some people — primarily infants and those with compromised immune systems — histoplasmosis can be serious. Effective treatments are available for even the most severe forms of histoplasmosis.”

Symptoms of histoplasmosis include muscle aches, fever, chills, headache, dry cough, and chest discomfort. It can also cause joint pain and rash in some people. Contact your doctor if you develop flu-like symptoms after being exposed to bird or bat droppings — especially if you have a weakened immune system.

**What to do if you have had or think you may have had contact with a bat:** Try to capture it and submit it for testing. Bats can be captured using heavy leather gloves, netting, or by covering them with a box or can, then slide a piece of cardboard or other stiff material under the container to trap the bat inside. Then, call your local health department, animal control office, or veterinarian to assist you with submitting it to a laboratory for rabies testing.

For information, contact your local health department or veterinarian.

Sources:

[www.dph.illinois.gov](http://www.dph.illinois.gov)

[www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org)

[www.health.mo.gov](http://www.health.mo.gov)

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

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