

Fight the **bite!**

Protecting yourself against rabies




York Region



What is Rabies?

Rabies is a fatal disease caused by a virus that affects warm blooded animals, including humans. Once symptoms appear, rabies is almost always fatal in animals and humans.

In Ontario, the most common animals that carry the rabies virus are bats, raccoons, skunks, and foxes. Animals such as cats, dogs and cattle can also get rabies if they are exposed to an animal that is infected with rabies.

How is rabies spread?

The rabies virus is spread by contact with saliva from an infected animal, generally from a bite, lick or scratch. It can also be spread by contact with the mouth, nose or eyes or an open cut or wound. Careless handling of a dead rabid animal can also spread the disease.

What should I do if I have been bitten or scratched by an animal?

Wash the wound with soap and warm water, and seek medical attention immediately.

Report the incident to York Region Community and Health Services Department as soon as possible, call **Health Connection 1-800-361-5653 (TTY 1-866-252-9933)** and speak to a Public Health Inspector.

What are the symptoms of rabies in animals?

Animals with rabies show different signs and symptoms and may not necessarily behave the same.

- Some animals can become violent or aggressive without any reason, are easily frightened or unusually tame
- Rabid animals may show signs of partial paralysis of the hind limbs, foaming of the mouth or show no symptoms at all

If your pet has any of these symptoms or behaves strangely, contact your veterinarian immediately.

Exposure to bats

People are considered at risk for exposure to rabies when:

- A bat bites or scratches a person
- Saliva from a live bat enters a person's mouth, nose, eyes or wound
- Bat touches or lands on a person

If you come into direct contact with a bat that is still alive, confine the bat in a room by closing all doors and windows. If the bat is dead, protect your children and pets by placing a box or container over the bat and contact **Health Connection**. Never attempt to catch the bat yourself.

How to "Bat Proof" your home

Some bats live in buildings, and there may be no reason to evict them if there is a little chance for contact with people. However, bats should always be prevented from entering rooms of your home.

It is best to contact a professional pest control or wildlife removal company to remove the bats from your home. If you choose to "bat-proof" your home yourself, here are some suggestions

Inspect your home for possible entry points

- Entry points are often near the edge of the roof, under the eaves or loose boards, openings in the roof or vents, or crevices around the chimney. Bats can also squeeze through very tiny spaces, some as small as six millimetres

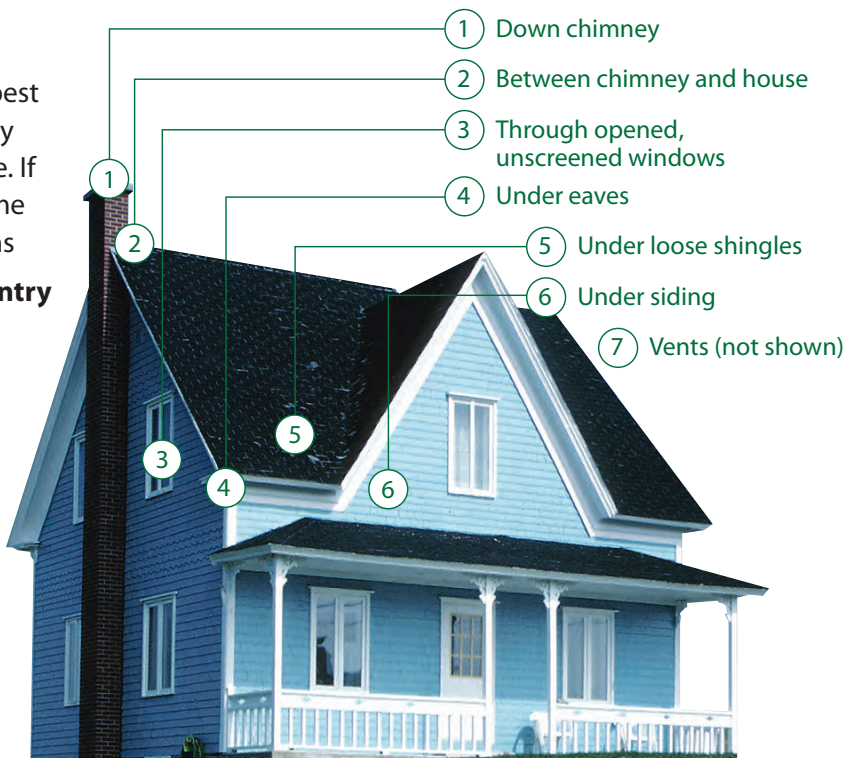
Bat proof your home

- Use window screens, chimney caps, and draft-guards beneath doors, fill electrical and plumbing holes with stainless steel wool or caulking and ensure all exterior doors close tightly
- Exclude bats by observing where the bat exits the building at dusk and then hang clear plastic sheeting or bird netting over these areas, This will help prevent bats from re-entering. After the bats have left, the opening can be permanently sealed

Pick the right time of year

- The best time to remove bats from your home is in the spring or the fall. Avoid excluding bats between May and August as this may trap young bats

Common Bat Entry Points





Treatment for humans

There is no cure for rabies once symptoms of the disease develop, making prevention extremely important. There are a series of vaccines available for people who may have been exposed to the rabies virus. The vaccine is designed to prevent the development of symptoms caused by the rabies virus including death if administered shortly after exposure.

If treatment is required, rabies vaccines (called rabies post-exposure prophylaxis) will be given and consist of a series of injections over a one-month period

How can I protect myself and my family?

There are many ways you can protect yourself and your family from rabies.

- If you are an animal owner, keep your pet's vaccinations up to date. Under Provincial law, dogs and cats three months of age and older are legally required to be immunized yearly against rabies
- Report all animal bites or scratch exposures to York Region Community and Health Services
- Teach your children to stay away from all unfamiliar animals and to immediately tell an adult if they have been bitten or scratched by an animal
- Avoid feeding, handling or coming into contact with all wild or unfamiliar animals
- Protect your pet from contact with wild animals by keeping them on a leash when they are off your property
- Never touch a dead animal with your bare hands. If you must dispose of a dead animal, wear thick protective gloves and use a shovel
- Do not try to assist a sick or dying animal; call your local animal control agency to report a sick animal
- Take measures to keep wild animals away from your home and property
- If you are travelling abroad, avoid contact with wild animals and be especially careful around cats and dogs in developing countries

**For more information on rabies
prevention, education and control
call *Health Connection* at
1-800-361-5653
TTY 1-866-252-9933
or visit www.york.ca**

Health Protection Division
June 2010