



# Durham Region Health Department FAX about...

For Health Care Professionals



## Rabies: Bat Exposures and Post-Exposure Prophylaxis

Rabies is an infectious viral disease that affects the central nervous system of humans and warm-blooded animals and although rare in Canada, once symptoms appear, rabies is nearly always fatal. This year, Durham Region Health Department (DRHD) has investigated over 1000 rabies investigations and has dispensed post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) to over 100 Durham Region residents.

Durham Region is seeing a seasonal increase in bat exposures and an increase in rabies PEP requests.

The Ministry of Health has provided the following guidelines pertaining to rabies PEP and bat exposures.

### When to request rabies PEP for bat exposures

Post-exposure rabies prophylaxis following bat contact is recommended when both of the following conditions apply:

- **There has been direct contact with a bat; AND**
- **A bite, scratch, or saliva exposure into a wound or mucous membrane cannot be ruled out.**

Direct contact with a bat is defined as the bat touching or landing on a person. When there is no direct contact with a bat, the risk of rabies is extremely rare and rabies PEP is not recommended.

In an adult, a bat landing on clothing would be considered reason for PEP administration only if a bite, scratch, or saliva exposure into a wound or mucous membrane could not be ruled out. Therefore, if a bat lands on the clothing of a person who can be sure that a bite or scratch did not occur and that the bat's saliva did not contact an open wound or mucous membranes, then PEP is not required.

In a child, any direct contact with a bat (i.e., the bat landing on or touching the child, including contact through clothes) could be considered a reason for PEP administration, as a history to rule out a bite, scratch or mucous membrane exposure may not be reliable.

When a bat is found in the room with a child or adult who is unable to give a reliable history, assessment of direct contact can be difficult. Factors indicating that direct contact may have occurred in these situations include the individual waking up crying or upset while the bat was in the room, or observation of an obvious bite or scratch mark.

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905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729 | [durham.ca/health](http://durham.ca/health)

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



# Management of people after potential exposure to bats

When there is a known bat bite, scratch or saliva exposure into a wound or mucous membrane, rabies PEP should be initiated immediately because of the higher prevalence of rabies in bats. This is particularly important when the exposure involves the face, neck or hands, or when the behaviour of the bat is clearly abnormal, such as if the bat has attacked the person or hangs on tenaciously. If the bat is available for testing, PEP may be discontinued after consultation with DRHD if the bat tests negative for rabies.

If someone is touched by a bat (such as a bat in flight) and the bat is available for rabies testing, the health care provider may decide to delay PEP. PEP should not be delayed more than 48 hours. If a bat tests positive for rabies, the need for PEP should depend on whether direct contact with the bat occurred and not the rabies status of the bat. If someone is touched by a bat and a bite, scratch or saliva exposure into a wound or mucous membrane cannot be ruled out, but the bat is not available for testing it should be considered a direct contact and PEP given.

Please refer to [Management of Potential Rabies Exposures Guideline, 2020](#) for additional information and to view an Algorithm for Bat Exposures and PEP administration.

## Reporting and ordering PEP

To report an animal bite call the Durham Health Connection Line (DHCL) at 905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729 or after hours, weekends and holidays 905-576-9991 or, by completing the online form found at - [www.durham.ca/en/health-and-wellness/resources--for-health-care-providers.aspx#Reporting](http://www.durham.ca/en/health-and-wellness/resources--for-health-care-providers.aspx#Reporting) (or at [www.durham.ca/hcp](http://www.durham.ca/hcp) under Forms, Reporting).

**To order rabies PEP** call 905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729 **ext. 4699** or after hours, weekends and holidays 905-576-9991.

August 15, 2023

