

# Fact Sheet Feuille de renseignements



Ministry of  
Natural Resources

Ministère des  
richesses naturelles

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## **BAT RABIES – THE FACTS**

### **What is bat rabies?**

- Rabies is a disease caused by a virus that attacks the mammal's central nervous system. It is spread by contact with the saliva of an infected animal.
- Like other mammals, bats may have rabies. There are eight species of bats in Ontario, each of which has its own strain of rabies, but the more common strains are Big Brown bat, Little Brown bat, and Silver-haired bat. The Silver-haired bat tends to be reclusive and therefore rarely comes into contact with humans.
- Rabid bats often lose their ability to fly, or do not fly well. They rarely become aggressive.
- Human rabies from bats is a concern, but a relatively rare occurrence. In Canada, since 1925, five of the 26 cases of human rabies have been due to contact with an infected bat.
- The last fatality in Canada was a 52 year old man from British Columbia in March 2003 after contact with a rabid bat.
- Careless handling of bats is the primary source of rabies exposure from bats.

### **What's the current situation with bat rabies in Ontario?**

- Despite large numbers of bats in southern Ontario, rabies is infrequent. From 2001 to 2005 there have been 314 bats confirmed with rabies in Ontario. Fewer than 2% of bats submitted for testing have rabies (2% of all bats acting strangely, dead, or have possibly bitten a human or pet). In the overall population, this percentage would be much lower.
- Although the percentage of rabid bats is low, any bat encountered should be considered rabid unless captured and proven otherwise. Bats have small, needle-like teeth and claws. Bites or scratches from a bat can easily go undetected.

### **What is the response to bat rabies by the Ministry of Natural Resources?**

- The MNR, in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, highlighted public awareness of bat rabies in 2001.

- It is important that the public know that bats can carry rabies and that they should seek medical advice if they come into contact with a bat. (see MNR News Releases: May 11, 2001)
- Bats cannot be vaccinated using baits, as has been done for foxes and raccoons, as they are insect-eaters and will not consume vaccine baits. However, despite large numbers of bats in southern Ontario, rabies is infrequent. International research is being conducted on vaccination methods for bats.
- Bats are an important part of our ecosystem and help reduce the insect population. Warn children to stay away from all wild animals, including bats. Submit all dead, sick, or easily captured bats to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency for rabies testing if exposure to people or pets has possibly occurred.
- Bat-proof your home. If bats are found in your home, seek expert advice:

**MNR District Offices:**

<http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/MNR/csb/message/mnr/offices.html>

**Bat Conservation International:**

<http://www.batcon.org/index.html>

For more information, see [BATS: ENJOY THEM FROM A DISTANCE](#).

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For more information visit [rabies.gov.on.ca](http://rabies.gov.on.ca)