

# [Detailed guide: Rabies in bats: how to spot it and report it](#)

*Updated:* Contact details for reporting a notifiable disease updated.

It is possible, although rare, for a bat infected with rabies to pass the disease on to other mammals, including humans.

The most recent case of rabies in a bat in Great Britain was in July 2018.

Rabies in bats is a [notifiable animal disease](#). If you suspect it you must report it immediately by calling the Defra Rural Services Helpline on 03000 200 301. In Wales, contact 0300 303 8268. In Scotland, contact your local [Field Services Office](#). Failure to do so is an offence.

## **Signs that a bat may have rabies**

Infected bats may not show any signs of rabies. Infection can only be confirmed in a laboratory.

But clinical signs in bats may include:

- behaviour changes: infected animals are prone to more aggression
- disorientation and difficulty flying (infected bats may be injured as a result)
- eyes taking on a staring expression

## **How rabies is spread**

Rabies is present in the saliva of infected bats and is usually spread by the bite of an infected bat.

The disease can also be spread if the saliva of an infected animal gets into open wounds or mucous membranes such as the nostrils, mouth and lips, eyelids and ears.

## **Risk to humans from infected bats**

Humans can catch rabies from a bat, although this is very unusual as the disease is very rare among bats in Great Britain.

In humans symptoms of the disease include:

- anxiety, headaches and fever in early stages
- spasms of the swallowing muscles making it difficult or impossible to drink

- breathing difficulties

There are vaccinations against rabies, and the disease can normally be prevented if you are treated soon after exposure. But once signs of rabies appear, there is no treatment. Past human cases have been fatal.

Read the [NHS guide to rabies](#) for more information about the disease in humans.

## **How to avoid catching rabies from a bat**

You should be vaccinated against rabies if you regularly handle bats.

If you have not been vaccinated against the disease:

- assume that all bats are possible carriers of rabies
- avoid touching bats, living or dead, whenever possible
- if you must touch a bat, [follow the Bat Conservation Trust guidance](#) and wear thick gloves to avoid being bitten or scratched

## **If you are bitten or scratched by a bat**

If you have been bitten or scratched by a bat, or exposed to bat saliva or nervous tissue in any other way, you must:

- wash the wound or contact area with soap and water
- disinfect the wound
- contact a doctor immediately who will decide whether you need treatment

## **If you suspect rabies in a bat**

If you suspect rabies in a bat or you see abnormal behavior in a bat [contact APHA](#) for help.

APHA vets will investigate and may submit the bat for testing to see whether the signs were caused by rabies.

## **If you find a dead bat**

If you find a dead bat:

- do not directly handle the bat if possible
- if you have to touch the bat [follow the Bat Conservation Trust guidance](#) and use thick gloves
- follow the Bat Conservation Trust guidance on [what to do with the dead bat](#)

## If your pet finds a bat

It is possible, although very rare, for infected bats to pass rabies to other animals including pets.

If your pet catches a bat, keep your pet under observation.

If your pet falls sick or starts behaving unusually, you must contact your vet immediately. Your vet will tell APHA if he or she suspects your pet has rabies.

## Monitoring rabies in bats in Great Britain

APHA [tests dead bats submitted by the public](#) to monitor how widespread the disease is in Great Britain.

Only 21 infected bats have been found in more than 15,000 tests since 1986, so the risk of catching rabies from a bat is very low.

Site	Location	Dates
1	Newhaven, Sussex	1996
2	Carnforth, Lancashire	2002
3	Blackburn, Lancashire	2003
4	Staines, Surrey	2004
5	Abingdon, Oxford	2006
6	Craven Arms, Shropshire (3 cases)	2007, 2008 and 2014
7	Teddington, Surrey	2008
8	Linlithgow, West Lothian, SCOTLAND	2009
9	Newtown, Powys, WALES	2015
10	Skipton, Yorkshire	2016
11	Haydon Bridge, Northumberland	2016
12	Chesterfield, Derbyshire	2017
13	Peterborough, Cambridgeshire	2018
14**	Robertsbridge, East Sussex (5 cases)	2018
15	Rothbury, Northumberland	2018

\*\* Once a positive case is confirmed at a site, we will not publicise further incidents there during the given year's 'bat season' – May to September.