

# What you should know about bats...



## Which bats enter my home?

Bats are plentiful in New Jersey and play an active role in the control of nuisance insects. Two kinds of bats in our area are often found roosting in colonies inside buildings, the big brown and little brown bats. Other bats, called solitary bats, do not usually enter buildings.

The **big brown bat**, large with a wingspread of about 14 inches, is our most common species. Colonies of up to 200 individuals return each spring to thousands of homes and other buildings in New Jersey. Although long-lived, reproduction is slow; only one or two young are born each year. If left undisturbed, a colony of bats will return to the same roost each spring for many years. The big brown bat accounts for over 75 percent of the bat contacts with people and pets and is the bat most often tested for rabies.

The **little brown bat** is also quite common in homes during the spring and summer, and large numbers hibernate in abandoned iron mines. However, the number of human and animal exposures, and the number of little brown bats found to be rabid, are much less than for the big brown bat.

## How do you get rid of bats in your home?

The only permanent method to get rid of bats from a home, and keep them out, is to exclude them by bat-proofing. There are no chemicals registered in New Jersey for killing bats and no lethal means should be used for any bats. Glue boards or fly paper should not be used in any area where bats are likely to encounter these products. The only chemical registered for bat control in New Jersey is naphthalene (mothballs), which can be effective as a temporary repellent in very confined roost areas. The use of naphthalene is no substitute for bat-proofing and does not guarantee that the bats will completely leave the building.

Bats often roost in dark, undisturbed areas, such as attics and wall spaces in homes. The entry points are often near the roof edge, such as under the eaves, soffits or loose boards, openings in the roof or vents, or crevices around the chimney. Bats may roost behind shutters or under boards without entering the home. Sometimes the only evidence of the presence of bats in a building will be an accumulation of droppings in one area of the attic, or droppings and rubmarks on siding at the bat entry opening. While the objective is to seal off all of the actual and potential bat entry points, care must be taken to follow the correct procedures to avoid blocking the bats inside the roost.

## How and when do you bat-proof buildings?

Bats are able to squeeze through openings as small as 3/8 of an inch wide. To confirm their presence and locate the openings used by bats in the warmer months, observe the building from the outside for bats leaving in the evening, from one-half hour before until one-half hour after sundown. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Fish and Game has posted detailed guidance on bat-proofing dwellings. This information, titled "Nuisance Wildlife Control for Bats" is posted on their website (<http://www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/ensp/bat.htm>).

Temporary methods to discourage bats from colonizing or “setting up housekeeping” in buildings in the spring include keeping the lights on in an attic roost area for 24 hours a day over several weeks, using fans to disturb the roosting bats with strong air currents or naphthalene.

### **Bat-Proofing the interior of the home**

Occasionally, bats enter rooms in homes from their roost area in the attic or wall spaces. Interior bat-proofing, such as sealing spaces around the attic door, caulking, flashing, weather stripping, or use of draft guards beneath doors will prevent the bats from accidentally entering living areas of the home until the bats can be excluded from the entire structure. Because fiberglass insulation is repellent to bats, insulating walls and attic will serve a dual purpose of energy conservation and bat control.

For additional guidance on capturing bats and excluding them from buildings, please consult the document “Bats in Buildings” posted on the Bat Conservation International website ([http://www.batcon.org/pdfs/education/fof\\_uq.pdf](http://www.batcon.org/pdfs/education/fof_uq.pdf)). Please note that the information in this website has illustrations showing a person capturing a bat without wearing protective gloves, and does not stress the importance of capturing and testing bats that appear sick, or have bitten, scratched, been in contact with people or pets, or have been in rooms where people were sleeping. In these situations, the local health department should be consulted and the bat should be submitted for rabies testing. Residents are warned to never touch or pick-up a bat with bare hands.

### **How to remove a bat flying inside your house?**

If you are **absolutely sure there has been no human or animal contact** with the bat, try to confine the bat in one room, turn on the lights, and open the windows. Because bats are able to detect air currents, they will usually leave at their normal time of activity at dusk.

If the bat is observed to land, it can be covered with a coffee can or other suitable container. **While wearing heavy protective gloves**, slide the container lid or a piece of cardboard under the container. If you are absolutely sure there has been no human or animal contact with the bat after, it can be carefully released outdoors. Some pest control companies or animal control officers will assist in the removal of a bat.

### **What if you are bitten, scratched or may have had contact with a bat?**

Because in recent years bats have been the source of the majority of human rabies cases acquired in the United States, it is important to understand how people may be infected by a rabid bat. Rabies is spread primarily by the bite of an infected animal. Healthy bats are not aggressive, but bats infected with rabies may have problems flying, may fly during the day, act aggressively, and attempt to bite people or other animals. Because not all infected bats display abnormal behavior, contact with bats, even when one is acting normally, should be avoided. Anyone who is bitten or has bare skin contact with a bat should report the episode to the local health department and the bat should be captured and tested for rabies, if possible. A directory of local health departments is available on the New Jersey Department of Health website (<http://www.state.nj.us/health/lh/directory/lhdselectcounty.shtml>)

In some of these cases, rabies transmission can occur from apparently limited contact with a bat. Because bat bites may be less severe, heal rapidly, and therefore, be more difficult to find or recognize than bites inflicted by larger mammals, ***rabies postexposure treatment should be considered for any physical contact with bats when bites, scratches, or mucous membrane (eye) contact with saliva cannot be excluded.***

If you are bitten, or scratched or the possibility of contact can not be excluded, try to confine or kill the bat ***without damage to its head***, to prevent additional exposures. ***Immediately cleanse the wound*** thoroughly with soap and water, and ***seek prompt medical attention*** from a physician or hospital emergency room. ***Report the bite*** or other exposure to your local health department as soon as possible. ***Using heavy protective gloves, tongs, or a shovel***, place the bat in a coffee can or other securely covered container and arrange with your local health department for ***delivery and testing*** at the New Jersey Department of Health Rabies Laboratory.

If your dog or cat is exposed to a bat, follow similar procedures in capturing the bat and contacting your local health department to report the incident and arrange for the testing of the bat. ***The greatest preventive measure is to have your dog or cat vaccinated against rabies*** before any exposure to a rabid animal.

### **What are some important facts about bats?**

- Bats are protected under the NJ endangered and Nongame Species Conservation Act, making it illegal to hunt, capture or kill them.
- Rabies infections are relatively rare in bats; less than one percent of bats carry the rabies virus and human attacks by bats are rare.
- Only a small number of bats, usually from 30 to 65, are annually found infected with rabies in New Jersey.
- All of the bats found in New Jersey are strictly insect eaters; a bat can consume hundreds of insects in an hour.
- Bats are not blind, but they depend more on their sonar than eyesight to navigate, avoid obstacles, and capture insects. They almost never get tangled in peoples' hair.
- Some of our common bats congregate in colonies, often in buildings. These social bats usually return to the same roost year after year and start maternity colonies in the spring. The young are born in June and July.
- Bats are true hibernators and usually enter caves, mines, buildings, and even sewers in the fall to hibernate over winter.
- Individual bats can live to be 30 years old; colonies can be present at the same location for over 100 years.

### **Where can I get more information on bats and rabies control?**

Your healthcare provider

Your local health department

NJ Department of Health website: <http://www.nj.gov/health>

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov>

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a healthcare professional.

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