



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES**

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Division of Public Health

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To: Local Environmental Health Staff, Local Health Directors and Summer Camp Directors

From: Zack Moore, MD, MPH, State Epidemiologist and Epidemiology Section Chief  
Larry D. Michael, REHS, MPH, Environmental Health Section Director

Subject: **Rabies Prevention through Minimizing Exposures to Bats and Wildlife at Summer Camps**

Summer camps provide children wonderful educational opportunities, but in some circumstances may pose a risk for exposure to wildlife and their diseases. Rabies is a disease of concern that, while rare in humans, is almost invariably fatal. Wild mammals in North Carolina may be infected with rabies, particularly bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes, beaver, groundhogs as well as bobcats, and coyotes. Domestic mammals, including cats, dogs and livestock, may also be infected with rabies in NC.

In the United States each year exposures to bats are implicated in one to two human deaths due to rabies. Rabies may be transmitted through direct contact with a bat, through a bite or scratch from a rabid animal, or if saliva from a rabid animal comes in contact with a mucous membrane or open wound. Unrecognized exposures to bats are a concern and may occur when persons in the same room as a bat are unaware that a bite or direct contact has occurred.

Finding a bat in a cabin can result in large numbers of campers and staff being potentially exposed to rabies and constitutes a “mass bat exposure.” These persons must be interviewed and assessed for possible exposure, and possibly referred for rabies postexposure prophylaxis. Fortunately, these circumstances can be prevented if local health departments and camp directors take the following safety measures.

**Prior to the opening of summer camps:**

**1. The Local health department should:**

- Contact summer camp directors in your jurisdiction, *early and before the camp is occupied*, to provide educational information about prevention of wildlife exposures and resources and to begin [bat-proofing](#) and wildlife-proofing camp facilities.
- Assist camp directors in developing [protocols and educational materials](#) about prevention of bat and wildlife exposures for both staff and campers. Education of staff and campers should occur at the beginning of each session and include: prevention of animal exposures, actions to take if wildlife is witnessed in camp facilities or on camp grounds and what to do if an animal bite or exposure does occur.

**2. Camp Directors should:**

- Begin safety measures to *bat-proof and wildlife-proof* facilities early, before the camp opens. Inspect facilities prior to use and on a daily basis. Eliminate potential wildlife entry points into buildings to ensure that bats and other wildlife are not present. Hire a Wildlife Damage Control Agent for professional inspection of facilities and exclusion of any bats and wildlife present in

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- the buildings.
- Train staff about rabies prevention measures. Instruct campers not to approach, touch, feed, capture or rehabilitate wild or stray animals, and to report wild or stray animals in or around buildings to camp officials.
  - Camp dogs, cats and livestock should have current veterinary health examinations to ensure they are free of internal and external parasites and infectious disease and have current rabies vaccinations if there is potential for human contact ([rabies vaccination certificate](#) should be on file). USDA licensed rabies vaccinations are available for dogs, cats, ferrets, horses, sheep and cattle.
  - Keep contact information for local and state health departments and animal control current and accessible.
  - Display attached posters.

**If an animal bite, scratch or other exposure occurs, take IMMEDIATE action:**

- Wash the wounds thoroughly with soap and running water for 15 minutes. Seek medical attention.
- Contact local animal control to capture the exposing animal, confine it, or have it tested (species-dependent).
- Report the exposure to the local health department communicable disease (CD) nurses, who will then provide rabies risk assessments of exposed individuals and public health recommendations.

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