**BE BAT SMART!**

Bats play an important role in B.C.’s ecosystem by eating insects and cycling nutrients. They also provide natural pest control - they can eat half their weight in bugs (including mosquitoes) every night! Sadly, many bats in B.C. are endangered. People are often scared of bats, but bats deserve respect and should be protected.

**Health risks**

In B.C., bats are the only known reservoir of rabies.

Outside of B.C., rabies can be found in bats and other wild animals (e.g. racoons, skunks, foxes) and domestic animals (e.g. dogs and cats).

Bats can carry different diseases, some of which are harmful to people, pets and other animals. For example, bats can carry rabies. Rabies is a serious illness caused by a virus that affects the brain and nervous system of humans and other mammals. People can get rabies when an infected bat bites or scratches them. If not treated quickly, a rabies infection is almost always deadly. However, it is rare to get rabies from a bat in B.C. – about 0.5% of B.C. wild bats carry the virus.

**Protect your health**

* Don’t touch bats, whether they’re alive or dead.
* Teach kids not to touch bats they find on the ground – they might be sick.
* Prevent bats from entering your home. For example, close doors and windows or install screens. Also, check your house for small holes or cracks and seal them - bats can fit through spaces as small as a dime!
* Vaccinate your pets against rabies and ensure their immunizations are kept up to date.

**If you or your family comes into physical contact with a bat:**

1. Immediately wash the wound with soap and water for at least 15 minutes
2. Contact your health care provider or the Island Health Communicable Disease Program for guidance. They will assess if you need any prevention treatment. They may also coordinate with you to have the animal submitted for testing only if indicated or warranted.

Island Health Communicable Disease Program:

 South Island: 1-866-665-6626

 Central Island: 1-866-770-7798

 North Island: 1-877-887-8835

Dead bats that have not been in direct contact with humans or pets can be reported to the B.C. Community Bat Program at 1-855-922-2287 or info@bcbats.ca.

For more information:

* HealthLink BC - [Rabies](https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/rabies)
* B.C. Government - [Managing bats in buildings](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/pesticides-pest-management/managing-pests/animals/bats)
* B.C. Community Bat Program - [Got bats?](https://bcbats.ca/got-bats/)