

Panhandle

Public Health District

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 11, 2026

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Panhandle Public Health District Reminds Residents to Take Precautions as Bats Seek Shelter

As temperatures begin to change, bats often become more noticeable as they search for sheltered places to roost. Panhandle Public Health District (PPHD) is reminding residents to take precautions when they encounter a bat and what steps to take if a bat is found inside a home or comes into contact with a person or pet.

Since July 2026, multiple United States jurisdictions have reported local increases in human rabies exposures involving known rabies vectors or animals in which rabies is less commonly reported. Rabies is a serious and potentially fatal viral disease that affects the nervous system. In the United States, bats are one of the most common wildlife species associated with rabies, and contact with a bat should always be taken seriously.

“Bats are an important part of our ecosystem, and most bats are not infected with rabies,” said Jessica Davies, MPH, Health Director of PPHD. “However, because a bat bite or scratch can be very small and may not always be obvious, it is important to avoid handling bats and to contact public health or a healthcare provider if there is any possibility of exposure.”

What should you do if you find a bat inside your home?

- Do not attempt to touch it with your bare hands. Keep people and pets away from the bat and, if possible, close it in a room where it can be contained.

If no contact with a human or a pet:

- Close doors to other rooms, open a window or exterior door and let the bat leave. Bats should not be handled directly.

If the bat has had possible contact with a person or pet:

- Do NOT release the bat. Contact PPHD, animal control, or another appropriate local authority for guidance on safely containing and testing the bat. Testing the bat can help determine whether rabies exposure occurred and whether medical treatment is necessary.

What if a person comes into contact with a bat?

- Seek medical advice if they have been bitten or scratched by a bat or if there is any possibility of direct contact. Bat bites can be difficult to see, and people may not realize they have been bitten.



If a bat is found in a room with someone who was sleeping, an unattended child, or someone who may not be able to reliably determine whether contact occurred, residents should contact public health or a healthcare provider for an assessment. Nebraska's rabies guidance specifically identifies these situations as circumstances that warrant evaluation.

If a bite or scratch occurs:

- Wash the area immediately with soap and running water for 15 minutes.
- Contact a healthcare provider or PPHD as soon as possible to determine whether rabies post-exposure treatment is needed.
- If it can be done safely, preserve the bat for possible rabies testing. Do not risk being bitten or scratched while attempting to capture it.

Rabies is preventable when appropriate treatment is received before symptoms develop.

“Taking a few simple precautions can help protect both people and pets while allowing bats to continue serving their important role in our environment,” Davies concluded.

Don't forget about pets

Pets can also be exposed to rabies through contact with bats and other wildlife. Make sure dogs, cats, ferrets, and other animals that can be vaccinated are current on their rabies vaccinations. If a pet catches, bites, mouths, or otherwise comes into contact with a bat, do not handle the bat or attempt to remove it from your pet with bare hands. Contact your veterinarian promptly for instructions and notify PPHD or local animal control as appropriate.

Preventing bats from entering your home

Residents can reduce the likelihood of bats entering their homes by inspecting buildings for openings where bats may get inside. Seal cracks and openings around roofs, vents, chimneys, windows, doors, and other potential entry points. If bats are already roosting in a structure, exclusion should be done carefully and preferably with assistance from a qualified wildlife professional.

For questions about a possible rabies exposure, contact Panhandle Public Health District at (308) 633-2866. Residents should also contact their healthcare provider following a potential human exposure or their veterinarian following a potential pet exposure.

Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety and quality of life for all who live, learn, work and play in the Panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle community.