



BCT Good Practice Guidelines on Bats and Rabies for Bat Groups (April 2003)

Following the death from bat rabies of a bat worker in Scotland in November 2002, the BCT, in conjunction with the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department of Health, has reviewed the Health and Safety advice given to bat groups and the general public on bats and rabies. We have produced these Guidelines and are asking Bat Groups to undertake to distribute them to all members of the group who handle bats. However, these Guidelines are likely to develop in response to feedback from bat groups, in which case we will let you know of changes. It is hoped that these Guidelines, together with the accompanying Bat Related Inquiries, cover most eventualities.

Whilst we all acknowledge that the risk of catching bat rabies from a British bat is extremely small, we do need to follow these good practice guidelines, not only to make bat work as safe as possible, but also to be responsible proponents of bat conservation.

Should another person die from bat rabies in the UK, not only will this be a tragedy for those directly concerned, the damage done to bats and bat conservation will be very difficult to repair.

Good Practice Guidelines

1. Anyone who handles bats regularly should be fully vaccinated against rabies.
2. Protective gloves should be worn when handling bats, even if you have received rabies vaccinations.
3. If anyone is bitten or scratched by a bat they must wash the area of the bite thoroughly but gently with soap and water, and then immediately phone their doctor for advice on post exposure treatment.
4. Bat workers who have not received rabies immunisation vaccines should not be sent out on any bat group or BCT business that is likely to involve handling bats (e.g. grounded or injured bat calls).
5. Only in an emergency situation where no vaccinated bat worker is available is it acceptable for an unvaccinated person (who must be aware of these Guidelines and the Protocols attached) to respond to the call. They must wear protective gloves to handle the bat. If bitten or scratched by the bat they must follow point three above.
6. Bats used for P.R. purposes at events or shown to the public at the bat workers' home should not be handled by members of the public. The bat worker who is presenting the bats should wear protective gloves when handling the bats.
7. Anyone who takes in grounded and injured bats must record the following details
 - who brought the bat to them
 - when they brought it in
 - who originally found the bat
 - date when the bat was found
 - place where the bat was found
 - contact details for these people
 - details of the bat, and the nature of any injuries and treatment

They must be able to match each bat up with its records. The BCT has forms for recording the details of grounded and injured bats; please contact the office if you require one.

8. Bat carers should ascertain whether anyone who brings bats in to them has been bitten or scratched by the bat, and if so they should advise them to seek post-exposure treatment from their GP immediately.
9. If a bat carer suspects that one of the bats in their care has rabies they must inform their local veterinary surgery immediately (there will be an on-call vet twenty four hours a day) and a decision must be made by the vet and the bat carer about whether the bat should be euthanased. If the bat is euthanased the vet will then get in touch with the local Animal Health Office. The AHO will arrange for the dead bat to be taken to the Veterinary Laboratories Agency. If the bat does turn out to have rabies, the bat carer will have to hand over the records on that bat to the AHO so that the AHO can contact the people who found the bat and brought the bat in.
N.B. Before symptoms are displayed the affected bat behaves normally but CAN STILL TRANSMIT THE VIRUS, but as the disease becomes more advanced the bat may become very agitated and overtly aggressive, or alternatively very quiet. There have been only two rabid bats identified in the U.K., so we have only limited examples of behaviour, but what was common in both cases was aggressive agitation and incoordination. At the later stages one bat roosted in the open and did not eat or groom; the other bat did eat and drink as normal until it was too weak to approach the feeding bowl, but it too stopped grooming and looked dishevelled.
10. All dead bats should be sent to the Veterinary Laboratories Agency as part of the ongoing passive surveillance programme; tubes and envelopes for sending dead bats are available from BCT on request. If a bat bit somebody before it died then this must be indicated on the form that accompanies the bat.
11. Any suspected vagrant bat, whether it is thought to have arrived in the U.K. by its own efforts, or whether it is thought to have been assisted (for example if it has been found in a shipment of goods) should be reported to the local Animal Health Office. The batworker should phone their local veterinary surgery, who will pass the details of the bat and the circumstances on to the local A.H.O.
12. When dealing with callers, bat groups that operate a Helpline should follow the Bat Related Enquiries produced by the BCT.