



North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Public Health

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Date: 12 May 2015
To: Local Environmental Health Staff, Local Health Directors and Summer Camp Directors
From: Dr. Megan Davies, State Epidemiologist, and Mr. Larry Michael, Section Chief Environmental Health
Subject: Rabies Prevention through Minimizing Exposures to Bats and Wildlife at Summer Camps

Summer camps offer unique opportunities for campers and staff to experience nature, but also the potential for exposure to wildlife and their diseases. Mammals commonly infected with rabies in North Carolina (rabies vector species) include bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes, beaver, groundhogs as well as bobcats, coyotes and other large carnivores. However, any mammal, including lower risk wildlife and cats, dogs and livestock, may be infected with and transmit rabies.

In the United States each year, about one to two human rabies cases result from unrecognized bat exposures or bat exposures that were not considered significant. Potential exposure to bats (including sleeping in a room or cabin where bats have been found) has resulted in large numbers of campers and staff being referred for rabies postexposure prophylaxis at great expense to camps and local and state health departments.

We recommend that local health departments contact summer camp and resident camp directors in their jurisdiction to provide information about prevention of wildlife exposures *before* camps open and when necessary to maintain safe camp environments. Camp directors can take safety measures in advance to *bat-proof* (http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/pdf/bats_final_508.pdf) their facilities prior to the camp opening and monitor their facilities closely for wildlife throughout the camping season. Information is included in the attached handout, *BATS: Safety and Risk Management at Camp*.

We also recommend that Local Health Department staff and summer camp directors develop partnerships and develop protocols to prevent bat and wildlife exposures and to ensure safe camp conditions. These protocols should include talking to campers at the beginning of each session about how to prevent exposures to wildlife and rabies and what to do if exposures occur.

If a bite or scratch from a wild, feral/stray or domestic animal occurs, IMMEDIATELY wash the victim's wound(s) thoroughly with soap and water for 15 minutes. Seek medical attention. Exposures to rabies may also occur when there is direct contact with a bat or in circumstances where persons were in the same room as a bat and might be unaware that a bite or direct contact had occurred (e.g., a sleeping person awakens to find a bat in the room or an adult witnesses a bat in the room with a previously unattended child, mentally disabled person, or intoxicated person). Camp staff should immediately contact local animal control to have the exposing animal captured/confined/tested (depending on the species) and report the bite/exposure to the local health department communicable disease nurses, who will then provide rabies risk assessments and medical guidance (http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/medical_care/index.html). If the exposing animal is not captured then camp staff should discuss referral of the exposed person for postexposure prophylaxis with the local health department communicable disease nurses.

Key rabies prevention strategies include the following:

- Inspect all facilities to ensure all bats, wildlife and potential portals of entry into buildings are eliminated prior to occupancy or use and on a daily basis to ensure that bats and other wildlife are not present.
- Hire a Wildlife Damage Control Agent (WDCA) for professional inspection and exclusion of bats and wildlife. Locate an agent in your county at <http://www.ncwildlife.org/Trapping/WildlifeDamageControlAgent.aspx>.
- Provide education to staff and campers to reduce the risk of rabies transmission, see the NC DHHS website on rabies at <http://epi.publichealth.nc.gov/cd/diseases/vph.html>.
- Instruct campers and staff to not approach, touch, feed, capture or rehabilitate wild or stray animals. Leave them alone.
- Be certain camp dogs, cats and other domestic animals are currently vetted, free of parasites, infectious disease and are rabies-vaccinated. Maintain proof of a current rabies vaccination (i.e., a rabies certificate) on file at the camp.

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- Keep contact information for the state and local health departments current and do not hesitate to contact the NC Division of Public Health Veterinarians at 919-733-3419 (24/7).
- Additional guidance about bats and rabies is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/bats/index.html>, to limit the risk of exposure to rabies.

Thank you for your time and assistance in this matter.