

A message from the Texas Department of State Health Services:

Now that it is spring/summer, we are seeing more bats in East Texas. Some of the species that migrated south to spend the winter in warmer climates have returned to our area. In addition, the major maternity season for bats in the US and Canada is from April through August.

The bat maternity season is significant for two reasons:

1. Since the young bats, called “pups,” may not be too adept at flying, some of them end up on the ground in their early efforts at flying. In all probability, they are not ill; they just don’t have their flight skills perfected yet.
2. Also, sometimes the mother bat actually carries the young with her as she flies. However, because of the extra weight she is carrying in the form of the pups, she may occasionally make a crash landing and rest awhile.

Though either of these “maternity” scenarios can result in a healthy bat’s being “grounded” or “downed,” we cannot be completely sure that any bat within reach of a human or a pet is not ill. Therefore, it is important to educate your citizens/clients about the need to avoid physical contact with any bat.

If a bat comes into physical contact with a person, either by flying into the person, landing on the person, or by being picked up or handled by the person, the person should try to capture the bat without further skin contact, so it can be tested for rabies. If available, an adult should carry out the capture. Contact animal control or a veterinarian to have the bat tested. There may be a cost to the person wanting the bat tested; however, it is certainly worth the money, if the bat has had contact with a person or a pet. If the bat is not available for testing, the person should speak with a physician or health department to assess the exposure.

If a person finds a “downed” bat or a bat in a building, and there has been **NO human or pet exposure**, and an adult is available and willing to do so, capture the bat and release it outside in an area distant from people.

Caution: A bat may look dead, but “come to life” when disturbed. Therefore, use precautions when picking up any bat.

Do NOT touch the bat with bare hands. Wear gloves and simply cover the bat with a small box or empty coffee can and slide a stiff piece of cardboard underneath so the bat is trapped inside the box or can. It is best not to release bats outside during the day unless the bat can be placed in a very protected area of a tree out of the direct sun. The bat moms are already exhausted and dehydrated and need to rest. If it is possible to do so without endangering the person, giving the mother bat a few drops of water with an eyedropper will help her. However, a person should not attempt to give water to the bat unless he/she is able to do so without danger to the person.

Some bats need to be above the ground to take flight, so moving the bat to a tree will help the bat be on its way. While still wearing your gloves, you can remove the cover and place the box on its side in a

tree. The bat may immediately fly or crawl out of the box onto the branches, or it may not fly away until dark.

For an excellent video on catching and removing a bat in a building, see this site:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzax0V0DG_M&feature=player_embedded#!

The lady who demonstrates in the video is a bat expert and is vaccinated against rabies. She is not wearing the gloves and shoes that you will want to wear when capturing a bat.

If the bat appears to be injured, you can contact animal control for help in disposing of the bat. If you would like to try to have the bat rehabilitated, you can look for a bat rehabilitator on the Bat World web site: http://www.batworld.org/local_rescue/maplists/map.tx.list.html

The other point associated with the bat maternity season concerns excluding or evicting bats from a building attic or other roost in which the bats have taken up residence. Now is not an ideal time to do exclusion because the young are not yet able to fly. If you do an exclusion (bat eviction) now, the adults will be able to get out, but the young will not. The pups will be trapped inside. Bat exclusion is best carried out in early spring (before maternity season) or in the fall (after August) when the young bats are able to fly well. If you want to learn how to evict bats from a building in which they are roosting, look at the info on this site: <http://www.batcon.org/index.php/bats-a-people/bats-in-buildings/subcategory/69.html>

Even during the maternity season, if a building has bats in its walls or attic, we do not want them to get lost and come into the parts of the building that people use. Therefore, any openings (they may be very tiny) that connect areas in a building where bats roost with interior living or working quarters should be sealed shut so that bats cannot enter those sections. Then when young are able to fly, the entire colony can be evicted and the building bat-proofed to prevent bats from returning.

One other reminder: Bats like to swoop down and grab a drink from standing water, such as a farm pond or swimming pool. They are not attacking people in or around the pond or pool. They are just looking for a drink. If a bat's sonar navigation is "off" because it is ill, the bat could end up crashing into the pool. A homeowner sometimes finds a dead bat floating in the pool or in the pool's "skimmer." In either case, the possibility of a dead bat in the pool presenting a health risk to people who might swim in the pool is remote. There are several reasons for the low risk:

1. The rabies virus does not live well outside the animal. Therefore, if a dead bat floating in a pool had rabies, the virus would not live very long after the bat died.
2. The dilution factor of a small amount of virus in the large volume of water in the pool would reduce any risk.
3. The relatively high concentration of chlorine in the pool water would inactivate the virus.