

Health & safety guidance for voluntary bat roost visitors: animal related disease

What are animal related diseases?

There are a variety of biological hazards that may be present on a roost visit and any of these could lead to disease if precautions are not taken to reduce the risks. The most common Zoonoses (animal related diseases) you will come into contact with will be associated with birds, rats and the bats themselves. Others might be present on more rural locations. Some of these diseases can be serious or fatal.

What are the hazards?

Some of the more common hazards are listed below but this is not exhaustive.

Rabies in bats or European Bat Lyssavirus (EBLV)

Transmitted through contact with an infected bat, eg through bites, scratches or saliva. Fatal viral disease if no treatment is received.

Bird droppings

Inhaling dust or water droplets containing contaminated bird droppings can lead to several diseases, including Psittacosis (a flu-like illness that can lead to pneumonia).

Rat infestation and exposure to rat urine

Rat urine or water contaminated with it can cause leptospirosis / Weil's disease if it enters a cut or gets into the nose, mouth or eyes.

Contamination with sewage or animal faeces

This can lead to infection with E. coli, a bacterium which can cause stomach problems or more serious ill health. Sewage could also be contaminated with Hepatitis A.

Exposure to the above even in small quantities can have a damaging effect on your health.

Managing the risks

You should:

- Ensure your rabies vaccination is current.
- Understand what to look out for and perform visual inspection to identify any hazards.
- Cover cuts and abrasions before any visit.
- Wear the correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Make appropriate arrangements for hygiene and first aid.
- Identify symptoms and early warning signs.

Rabies vaccination

All Voluntary Bat Roost Visitors and trainees must have up-to-date rabies vaccination. Further rabies guidance, including how to obtain the free vaccine, is on the [Rabies page](#) of our website.

Identify and understand the hazard

Training - ensure you have the right experience and training to go into these areas. Natural England is considering how we might provide on-line training on Zoonoses. Please regularly check the [VBRV Training page](#) of our website for updates.

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Covering cuts and abrasions

Your skin is a natural defence against many animal transmitted diseases, but cuts and abrasions will allow absorption into your blood stream so ensure that any cuts and abrasions are well covered with waterproof plasters.

Use of the correct PPE

PPE can play an important role in protecting you from some of the hazards, examples include:

What	Protects against
Gloves	Absorption through skin. Direct contact with harmful substances. Bites
Dust masks	Inhalation of harmful substances
Goggles	Absorption through direct contact with eye
Overalls	Contact with hazardous substances onto personal clothing

There is more guidance on PPE available in the TIN159 [Natural England PPE Technical Information Note](#).

Hygiene and first aid

You need to consider the following:

- Arrangements for washing your hands after the visit and - importantly - before eating, drinking or smoking.
- Correct disposal of any gloves / coveralls which may have come into contact with a dangerous / hazardous substance.
- A small first aid kit to treat any minor injuries.

Identifying symptoms and early warning signs

If you think you have been exposed to any of the animal related diseases contact your GP.

The Public Health England and NHS website has additional guidance on many of the common Zoonoses. See also the table on page 3.

Reporting an incident

You must report any accident, near miss or incident which occurs whilst performing or travelling to / from a roost visit to Natural England as soon as possible:

- Contact the Natural England 'near miss and incident reporting line' at any time on 0300 060 0100.
- If the incident results in injury to another person or damage to property please also contact: Martin Rhodes 0300 060 2676 or Lucy Foster 0300 060 0666.

Feedback

If you have any feedback about this guidance or would like to see additions / amendments please get in touch by emailing:

batvolunteers@naturalengland.org.uk

Further information

Please see our website page and other VBRV health and safety leaflets at:

[Health and safety for voluntary bat roost visitors](#)
[Publications for voluntary bat roost visitors.](#)

Natural England Technical Information Notes are available to download from the Natural England website: www.naturalengland.org.uk.

For further information contact the Natural England Enquiry Service on 0300 060 0863 or e-mail enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk.

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Table: Symptoms and early warning signs

Disease	Source encountered on roost visits	Usual mode of transmission to humans	Symptoms
Cryptosporidiosis	Pets	Water Direct contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe watery diarrhoea
Hantavirus syndromes	Rodents	Aerosol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiredness • Fever • Muscle aches in thighs, hips, back, & sometimes shoulders.
Leptospirosis	Rodents	Infected urine Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High temperature that is usually between 38 & 40°C (100.4 & 104°F) • Chills • Sudden headaches • Nausea and vomiting • Loss of appetite • Muscle pain (particularly affecting calves & lower back) • Conjunctivitis (irritation & redness of eyes) • Cough • Short-lived rash
Q fever	Cats	Aerosol Direct contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High temperature of 38°C (100.4°F) • Severe headaches • Muscle & joint pain • Sweats • Sore throat • Sensitivity to light • Weight loss
Rabies	Bats	Bites Scratches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High temperature of 38°C (100.4°F) or above • Chills • Fatigue (extreme tiredness) • Problems sleeping • Lack of appetite • Headache • Irritability • Anxiety • Sore throat • Vomiting

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Disease	Source encountered on roost visits	Usual mode of transmission to humans	Symptoms
Toxoplasmosis	Cats	Ingestion of faecal material	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aching muscles• Fever of 38°C (100.4°F) or over• Tiredness• Feeling sick• Sore throat• Can lead to miscarriage / still birth in pregnant women