



**Ministry of Health
and Long-Term Care**

**Ministère de la Santé
et des Soins de longue durée**

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Medical Officers of Health and Associate Medical Officers of Health

RE: White Nose Syndrome in Bats – Fact Sheet

Further to the memorandum issued to health units on March 13, 2010 advising of the detection of White Nose Syndrome (WNS) in Ontario's bat populations, the Public Health Division has developed the attached WNS Fact Sheet.

The Fact Sheet provides information on WNS from a public health perspective, reporting unusual bat deaths, and handling bat carcasses (when this is unavoidable) in order to minimize the risks of potential rabies exposure.

Please circulate the Fact Sheet to all health unit staff who may be responding to calls about bats and distribute to the general public within your jurisdiction. The Ministry will also be making this Fact Sheet available to the general public on its website.

Should you have any questions or concerns about WNS in bats and/or rabies transmission risk assessments for bat exposures, please contact Dr. Catherine Filejski, Veterinary Consultant, Public Health Protection and Prevention Branch, at (416) 212-0424 or Catherine.filejski@ontario.ca.

David C. Williams, MD, MHSc, FRCPC
Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health, Health Protection

Attachment

c: Dr. Arlene King

White Nose Syndrome in Bats

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

White Nose Syndrome in Ontario

In March 2010, Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources confirmed the first diagnosis of White Nose Syndrome (WNS) in Ontario bats.

WNS is a condition of bats named for the white fungus which grows on the face, ears and wings of affected animals. Other signs include poor body condition (emaciation and dehydration), as well as behavioural changes (bats flying in daylight hours during the winter and early spring). The cause of the syndrome is still under investigation.

At this time, WNS and the fungus associated with the syndrome are not known to cause any human health issues. Bats with WNS have been found in caves in the northeastern United States since 2006. Some of these caves have been visited by thousands of people, with no illnesses reported.

However, bats with WNS leave their hibernation sites far too early in the spring, can be seen flying around in the daytime, and are more likely to come into contact with the general public as they become weak from lack of food and die out on the landscape.

A small percentage of bats with WNS may also be rabid. As a result, members of the public are asked NOT to handle any bats they may encounter.

The public is also asked to refrain from entering non-commercial caves or abandoned mines where bats may be present.

Reporting Unusual Bat Deaths

Unusual bat deaths should be reported to the Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre at 1-866-673-4781 or the local Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources field office.

Handling Bat Carcasses

Members of the public are strongly discouraged from handling bats (live or dead) under any circumstances.

If dead bats MUST be handled for purposes of disposal (*i.e.* the carcass is found inside a dwelling or shelter, or on a porch, and is not going to be picked up for WNS testing), the following routine practices guidelines for handling any dead wildlife should be followed:

- 1) Please make sure that a bat is really dead before attempting to pick it up. **DO NOT PICK UP OR TOUCH A BAT THAT SEEMS TO BE SICK, MOVING SLOWLY OR UNABLE TO FLY, BUT IS STILL ALIVE.** To ensure that a bat is dead, the animal should be gently prodded with a stick to see if it is still responsive before touching it or picking it up.
- 2) Bat carcasses should be handled using an implement such as a small shovel or large tongs, rather than by hand.

- 3) If the use of a small shovel or large tongs is not possible, heavy-duty, leak-proof rubber gloves (*e.g.* the type used in household cleaning) must be worn, preferably over top of leather work gloves, to avoid contact with skin or clothing. Any pre-existing cuts, wounds or scratches on the skin must be appropriately sealed off and protected prior to putting on the gloves.
- 4) If possible, bat carcasses should be buried, unbagged, several feet deep, where they will not be disturbed.
- 5) If burial is not possible, the carcass(es) should be placed in a puncture-resistant, heavy-duty, leak-proof plastic bag of appropriate size, either by using an implement to deposit the bat in the bag, or by:
 - inverting the bag over the hand,
 - grasping the carcass through the bag,
 - and wrapping the bag around the bat without touching it.

The bag should be sealed securely by a twist-tie, knotted string, or by knotting the bag tightly on itself.

The bag should then be placed inside a second leak-proof plastic bag, which is similarly sealed,

Care should be taken to ensure that the bat's teeth or claws do not puncture the bags.

A video entitled "How to Properly Dispose of a Dead Bat" demonstrating the use of a trowel with the double bagging method is available on the website of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/wnsaudiovideo.html>

Double-bagged bat carcasses should be kept out of the reach of children and pets, and can be placed in garbage destined for a landfill approved to take animal remains. In municipalities where disposal in household garbage is prohibited, please call the municipality for directions.

- 6) Do not dispose of bat carcasses in a manner such that they could be handled again by someone or be accessible to any domestic animals.
- 7) **Anyone handling bat carcasses should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water**, lathering for at least 15-20 seconds, after the carcass is appropriately contained. The same handwashing instructions should be followed after handling contaminated clothing or equipment.
- 8) Individuals who are inadvertently bitten by a bat that is still alive, scratched while handling a bat, or come into direct contact with a bat where a bite or scratch cannot be ruled out must **IMMEDIATELY** wash the site of the wound thoroughly with running warm water and soap for 5 minutes, then dab the site with iodine or rubbing alcohol, and notify their healthcare provider.
- 9) Only those bats involved in biting or scratching incidents should be submitted for rabies testing, and should not be disposed of by burial or in a landfill. **DO NOT** attempt to handle a live bat in such a case.