Bats, Cats, Attics, and Antics—Bizarre Stories of Rabies and Risks

**Bizarre Basketball Bats**

An NBA basketball game was interrupted on February 7, 2019, at the Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis, Indiana, when a bat flew into the arena, causing the players to scatter off court.\(^1\) Guards, referees, and courtside officials tried to capture the bat with towels as the theme song to the 1960s Batman television series played comically in the background.

That wasn’t the first time, either, that the presence of bats resulted in the suspension of an NBA game. Visits by bats seem to be such a familiar event at the AT&T Center in San Antonio that some wonder if the bats have season tickets.\(^2\)

The AT&T stadium officials and home courtside assistants are accustomed to bat occurrences. Their team mascot is actually outfitted in a Batman jersey and mask and is quite good at capturing the little critters with a fishing net. The fact that the AT&T Center is close to Bracken Cave—home to more than 15 million bats and the largest summer bat colony in the world—and sits right in the bats’ migratory pathway—may explain the high number of run-ins (see figure).

But it’s not all fun and games. The February 7 incident at the Bankers Life Fieldhouse prompted the Indiana State Department of Health to issue a statement advising anyone who had contact with the bat to contact them or their doctor as soon as possible.\(^3\) That’s because—as you know—bats can carry the rabies virus. In fact, bat bites are the most common mode of transmission for rabies.\(^4\)
Bats continue to emerge as the leading rabid species in the US.\textsuperscript{5} The 2017 data show a 6% rabies positivity rate among tested bats. And across the contiguous US, 47 jurisdictions reported rabid bats (see figure).

**Rabies Has Increased in Bats Since 1967\textsuperscript{5}**

![Rabies Has Increased in Bats Since 1967](image)

Rabid Bats Were Reported in 47 of the 48 Contiguous United States in 2017\textsuperscript{5}

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Adapted from Ma 2018
Creepy Cats

An even scarier story than the one about the basketball bats might be the recent incidents in which two women were bitten by a stray cat that tested positive for rabies. The women bitten by the cat in the town of Sullivan in Madison County, New York, received rabies postexposure prophylaxis (PEP) treatment. “Residents should be on alert and play it safe, and avoid contact with wild animals and pets you don’t know,” said Geoffrey Snyder, the Madison County environmental health director. That report followed only 5 days after a very similar incident in Jacksonville, North Carolina. A woman feeding wild cats was bitten by one of the feral creatures. The cat was captured following the attack, euthanized due to its neurological symptoms, and tested positive for rabies.

Haunting Attic Infestations

Then there’s the account of a haunting infestation by a massive bat colony composed of more than 5000 bats in two Utah high schools. The discovery of the colonies in one high school’s auditorium led to the closing of that part of the school of a month, the PEP treatment of approximately 50 students due to exposure risk, and spending $350,000 to close gaps in 2017. Interestingly, Utah is one of only 8 states in the US where bats were the only rabies-carrying species detected in 2017.

Wherever the risk, awareness is key both for the public who might be exposed, and their healthcare providers, so that prompt care and PEP can be administered after suspected exposures.
**Indication and Usage**

HYPERRAB® (rabies immune globulin [human]) is indicated for postexposure prophylaxis, along with rabies vaccine, for all persons suspected of exposure to rabies.

**Limitations of Use**

Persons who have been previously immunized with rabies vaccine and have a confirmed adequate rabies antibody titer should receive only vaccine.

For unvaccinated persons, the combination of HYPERRAB and vaccine is recommended for both bite and nonbite exposures regardless of the time interval between exposure and initiation of postexposure prophylaxis. Beyond 7 days (after the first vaccine dose), HYPERRAB is not indicated since an antibody response to vaccine is presumed to have occurred.

**Important Safety Information**

*For infiltration and intramuscular use only.*

Severe hypersensitivity reactions may occur with HYPERRAB. Patients with a history of prior systemic allergic reactions to human immunoglobulin preparations are at a greater risk of developing severe hypersensitivity and anaphylactic reactions. Have epinephrine available for treatment of acute allergic symptoms, should they occur.

HYPERRAB is made from human blood and may carry a risk of transmitting infectious agents, eg, viruses, the variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD) agent, and, theoretically, the Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) agent.

The most common adverse reactions in >5% of subjects during clinical trials were injection-site pain, headache, injection-site nodule, abdominal pain, diarrhea, flatulence, nasal congestion, and oropharyngeal pain.

Do not administer repeated doses of HYPERRAB once vaccine treatment has been initiated as this could prevent the full expression of active immunity expected from the rabies vaccine.

Other antibodies in the HYPERRAB preparation may interfere with the response to live vaccines such as measles, mumps, polio, or rubella. Defer immunization with live vaccines for 4 months after HYPERRAB administration.

Please see accompanying full Prescribing Information for HYPERRAB. You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088.