



White-nose Syndrome and Ohio Frequently Asked Questions

What is white-nose syndrome?

White-nose syndrome (WNS) is a disease responsible for the unprecedented mortality in hibernating bats. WNS is associated with a newly identified fungus, *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* (PD) which often grows into white tufts on the muzzles of infected bats, hence the name.

How is WNS transmitted?

Transmission of the fungus (PD) associated with WNS is believed to occur in 2 ways: 1) through bat to bat contact and 2) by humans visiting caves and mines. Hibernacula conditions (high humidity and low temperatures) make it an ideal place for the growth and spread of the fungus. PD spores are extremely small, thus cavers (spelunkers) or others working in mines and caves may inadvertently transfer the fungus on their clothing, shoes, and gear between caves and mines. All individuals entering mines or caves should follow the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) decontamination protocol listed on the USFWS WNS webpage.

Does WNS pose a risk to human health?

There is no evidence that WNS is infectious to humans. The fungus does not grow at temperatures above 68 degrees Fahrenheit, which is much lower than human body temperatures. Biologists use protective clothing when entering caves or mines and when handling bats.

How does WNS kill bats?

WNS primarily affects bats during hibernation. WNS is believed to disrupt bat hibernation, causing bats to prematurely and repeatedly arouse from hibernation. When bats arouse from hibernation they quickly deplete their fat reserves needed for survival through the winter. Bats weakened by the loss of fat reserves are unable to replenish them during the winter due to a lack of food (insects) and therefore die.

Why are bats important?

Bats play an important role in the ecosystem, serving as a top predator for night flying insects including mosquitoes, beetles, moths, and other human, agricultural and forest pests. Ohio is home to 11 species of bats, 1 of which is a state and federally endangered species (Indiana bat).

Where is WNS found and when was WNS first documented?

The disease was first detected in New York State in 2006. Since its initial discovery in 2006 WNS has spread across the eastern United States and Canada. WNS was first documented in Ohio in March 2011.

What is being done in Ohio?

The Ohio Division of Wildlife and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service work cooperatively to monitor Ohio's bat population and conduct disease surveillance for WNS, so that management strategies to reduce the spread of WNS can be implemented where applicable. Ohio will continue to assess bat populations and impacts of WNS to contribute to larger national efforts to slow the movements and minimize the impacts of WNS.

What are signs of WNS?

- White fungus, especially on the bat's nose, but also on the bat's body (wings, ear, tail)
- Flying outside during the day in very cold temperatures
- Bats clustered near the entrance of hibernacula
- Large numbers (6 or more) of dead or dying bats on the ground, on buildings, trees or other structures during cold winter months.

What do I do if I suspect WNS?

Finding a dead bat does not mean it has WNS. Bats die for many different reasons, including other diseases, animal attacks and poisoning.

WNS appears to be a disease of cave (or mine) hibernating bats, therefore we are primarily interested in reports of dead or sick bats exhibiting the any of the above listed signs of WNS that are near hibernacula.

If you see any of the above listed signs of WNS:

- Contact the Ohio Division of Wildlife (wildinfo@dnr.state.oh.us, or 1-800-WILDLIFE).
- Do NOT handle the bats. Although most bats are not rabid, bats are the primary rabies-positive animal in Ohio and therefore should not be handled.
- Photograph the potentially affected bats as closely as safely possible and send pictures to the above listed contact.

More information on WNS is available at:

<http://bit.ly/WhiteNoseSyndrome>

www.fws.gov/whitenosesyndrome

www.fws.gov/whitenosesyndrome/pdf/WNSDecontaminationProtocol_v012511.pdf

http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease_information/white-nose_syndrome/