



Bats are beneficial to people and the environment, but they can carry and transmit rabies, a fatal disease. Learn how to reduce contact between people and bats around the home.



Bats benefit humans and the environment as they are effective predators of night-flying insects (including mosquitoes), and act as pollinators of plants and trees. Unfortunately, bats can carry rabies, a deadly virus, which means close contact with bats should be avoided—including bare-handed contact.

Rabies in Washington State

Rabies is a deadly virus that affects the central nervous system. Any warm-blooded mammal, including humans, can get rabies; however, bats are the only animal in Washington state known to carry rabies. The rabies virus is found in the saliva of a rabid animal. It is usually spread to humans by animal bites and can also be spread if the virus comes in contact with the eyes, nose, mouth, open cuts, or wounds.

The primary carrier of rabies in the Northwest is bats. Rabid bats have been found in every county in Washington, including Spokane County. Between 3-10% of bats submitted for testing are found to be rabid, while rabies occurs in less than 1% of the whole bat population. In 2016, of 297 bats tested for rabies in the state, 20 rabid bats were identified, including 3 in Spokane County.

A potential rabies exposure between a human and a bat should never be taken lightly. Every year, people in the state receive treatment for exposure to rabid or potentially rabid animals. Bats can also spread rabies to pets and other animals. In Washington, the last rabies cases reported in cats and dogs were in 2015 and 2002 (cats) and 1987 (a dog).

Bat-Proof Homes

Bats will seek shelter under covered porches; in attics, walls, and chimneys; under siding; and in other areas of a structure. Bats can squeeze through cracks and holes as small as ½ inch. To prevent bats from entering the home, make sure windows and doors that are left open in warmer months are screened. To prevent bats from entering the chimney, close the damper. Fill any holes where pipes and wires enter through the siding. Close pet doors at night to prevent pet cats or dogs from bringing a bat into the house.

When a Bat Gets Inside the Home

Potential Contact with Humans

If a bat enters the home, there could be potential contact with humans. Bats have small teeth and claws so any bite or scratch marks may be difficult to see. Contact Spokane Regional Health District at 509-324-1560, ext. 7 to determine if the bat needs to be caught and tested for rabies.

Contact a health care provider, under the following circumstances, even in the absence of an obvious bite or scratch:

- A bat is found in a room or had access to a room with a sleeping person (e.g. bedroom door open to a hallway).
- A bat is found in a room with an unattended child.
- A bat is found in a room with a person under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or who has another sensory or mental impairment.

A bat is found near a child outside.

If the health district requires the bat to be collected for rabies testing, follow the instructions below to safely capture the bat. Never handle a bat with bare hands.



When Bats are Living in the Home

The best way to remove bats already living in a home is to exclude them. This should be done in a way and at a time of year that will not trap bats in the structure. There are methods to do this, such as utilizing one-way exit tubes that prevent bats from re-entering. For more detailed information on how to exclude bats from a home, see the link below under Resources.

A certified nuisance Wildlife Control Operator, experienced in bat removal, can also be hired to safely relocate bats. Note that state wildlife and local animal control agencies do not provide bat removal services. For guidance on hiring an operator and to search a list of certified operators by area, see the link below under Resources.

When Bats are Roosting Outside

Bats will temporarily roost under porches or overhangs at night to eat insects, rest and socialize. They may also roost during the day to sleep. To discourage bats that are roosting under a porch, try leaving a porch light on or hang Mylar balloons or aluminum foil in the entryway. Nontoxic dog or cat repellent can also prevent night roosting. Apply the spray to the walls during the day when bats are not present.

PREVENT CONTACT WITH ROOSTING BATS

If you see a bat roosting during the day or night DO NOT TOUCH IT. Keep children and pets away and chances are it will eventually leave and not return.

Sick or Dead Bats

If a dead bat is found and there has not been contact with a person or animal, then it should be disposed of to prevent contact with children, pets or other animals. Follow the collection and disposal directions below, taking care not to directly handle the bat.

If a sick bat is in a yard or area where a child or pet could contact the bat, then measures should be taken to remove children and pets from the area until the bat leaves or dies. A certified nuisance Wildlife Control Operator can be hired to relocate the bat. For guidance on hiring an operator and to search a list of certified operators by area, see the link below under Resources.

White-Nose Syndrome

It is important to note that sick or dead bats may have been exposed to a disease other than rabies, such as the emerging disease white-nose syndrome (WNS). This is a devastating fungal disease, not transmittable to humans, that has killed more than 6 million bats since 2006, predominately in eastern North America. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is monitoring bat populations and bats submitted to DOH for rabies testing for the WNS disease. To date, two bats from Washington state have tested positive for this disease.

To survey the possible spread of WNS disease in Washington, WDFW is requesting that citizens report sick/dead bats and groups of bats. For a fact sheet and link to the reporting form, see the link below under Resources.

Safely Capturing Bats

Only capture bats that have had direct contact with a person or pet, or if the bat was found in a room where it may have come in contact with a person or a pet (e.g., while they were sleeping) or if direct contact cannot be ruled out. Do not release a live bat or throw out a dead bat unless Spokane Regional Health District staff determine that it is not necessary to test the bat. Testing the bat may be important to decide whether the exposed person(s) will require treatment to prevent rabies. To safely capture a bat, follow these steps:

1. Never handle a bat with bare hands. Wear leather or thick rubber work gloves.
2. If the bat is still flying, gently strike it with a broom or tennis racket to knock it down, or capture it with a net or cover it with a towel. If a bat is in a pet's mouth, try using tongs to remove it. **The brain needs to be in good condition for testing, so do not smash the bat's head.**
3. Wait until the bat has landed, then place an empty can, small box, or food storage dish over the bat. Slide cardboard under the container to contain the bat.
4. Carefully replace the cardboard with the container's lid to securely keep the bat contained, or tape the cardboard over the top. Make sure the top is firmly attached to the container so the bat will not escape. Punch small air holes in the lid of the container (about 2-3 mm) using a nail or small screwdriver.
5. Place the container in a quiet area away from heavy human or animal activity. Do not refrigerate, freeze, or kill a live bat.
6. If the bat is dead or injured and not flying, pick it up with a shovel or dust pan and place it in a container.
7. Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water.
8. Contact Spokane Regional Health District at (509) 324-1560, ext. 7, to answer questions about contact between the bat and people or pets.
9. Always keep the bat in the container until the health district decides whether the bat needs to be tested for rabies.
 - o If the bat needs to be tested for rabies, the health district will make the necessary arrangements and provide instructions.
 - o If the health district determines there is no need to test the bat, then the bat may be carefully released outdoors.

Disposing of a Dead Bat that Does Not Need Testing

- Wear heavy protective gloves.
- Pick the bat up with a shovel, or other cleanable or disposable implement.
- Place the bat in a plastic bag and tie closed or place in a disposable plastic container and close the lid.
- Double-bag the contained/bagged bat in another plastic bag.
- Place in a tightly secured garbage container that children and pets cannot access.
- Disinfect the collection implement with a 10% bleach solution (1/4 cup of 5.25% household bleach in 2 ¼ cups of water).
- Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water.
- Wash or dispose of the gloves.

Contact Us

Spokane Regional Health District Zoonotic Disease Program: 509.324.1560, ext.7

Additional Handouts: BatSmart - People Safe, BatSmart - Pet Safe, BatSmart - Bats & Rabies

Resources

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)

Bat information and bat-proofing house
wdfw.wa.gov/publications/00605/wdfw00605.pdf

Exclude bats from a home
wdfw.wa.gov/publications/00605/wdfw00605.pdf

Report dead or sick bats
<https://wdfw.wa.gov/get-involved/report-observations>

Find a certified Wildlife Control Operator
<https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/living/nuisance-wildlife/wildlife-control-operators>

Fact sheet on white-nose syndrome in bats
<https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/diseases/bat-white-nose>

Adapted from Washington State Department of Health rabies website and Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife Living with Wildlife website.