



Bats are beneficial to the environment, but they can carry and transmit rabies, a fatal disease. Learn how to reduce the risk of pets catching rabies and passing it on.

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 between bats and pets should be avoided.

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).

Pets and Rabies Vaccinations

It is not uncommon for pets like cats and dogs to come into contact with bats, particularly if they are outside at night. Since cats are predatory hunters, they are especially likely to catch a bat. To help prevent rabies transmission, it is the law in Washington state that all cats, dogs, and ferrets be vaccinated against rabies.

VACCINATE PETS AGAINST RABIES

*It's required for dogs, cats
and ferrets in Washington state.*

WAC 246-100-197 states: an owner of a dog, cat, or ferret shall have it vaccinated against rabies and re-vaccinated following veterinary and vaccine manufacturer instructions. An "owner" is any person legally responsible for the care and actions of a pet animal.

Note: Rabies vaccines are also available for some livestock, including horses and cattle.

Even though rabies is not common in pets or people, it is still a good idea to vaccinate pets for the following reasons:

- Pets are more likely than people to come in to contact with bats. Vaccinating pets prevents them from getting rabies and is one of the most effective ways to prevent rabies exposure in people.



Avoiding Contact Between Pets and Bats

Since bats are mostly active at night, to help prevent pets' contact with a bat:

- Bring pets into the house at night.
- Keep all doors and windows closed unless screened.
- Close pet doors to prevent pets from going outside or bringing a bat inside the house.

When Pets Catch Bats

- **Safely catch the bat if possible**, taking care not to contact the bat (see below).
- **Thoroughly wash any bite wound** on the pet with soap and water while wearing gloves. Bats have small teeth and claws, so bite marks may be hard to see.
- **Contact** Spokane Regional Health District at 509.324.1560, ext. 7 for additional instructions.
- **Contact** your veterinarian for a rabies booster for the pet.

- If an unvaccinated dog, cat or ferret is bitten by a stray or wild animal, it must either be euthanized and tested for rabies or confined and observed for up to 6 months. If the pet develops signs of rabies while in confinement, it must be euthanized and tested for rabies.
- If a vaccinated dog, cat or ferret is bitten by a stray or wild animal, then it simply needs a rabies booster vaccine and needs to be observed for changes in health for 45 days.
- Rabies vaccines for pets are an inexpensive way to protect people and other animals. It is worth spending a few dollars to vaccinate pets instead of spending thousands of dollars on confinement and the potential tragedy of losing a pet.

Indoor Pets and Rabies Vaccinations

There are frequent reports of bats, which can carry rabies, getting into houses. Pets can get rabies from playing with or killing a rabid bat. Find out more about bat-proofing homes on BatSmart – Home Safe.



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 - Home Safe, BatSmart - Bats & Rabies

Resources

To report animal bites

Spokane County Regional Animal Protection Service (SCRAPS) 509.477.2533

<http://www.spokanecounty.org/567/SCRAPS---Regional-Animal-Protection>

Adapted from Washington State Department of Health rabies website.