



# Rabies Prevention

*Information for Animal Owners and Individuals Bitten by an Animal*

## Spokane Regional Health District and Animal Bites

Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD) investigates animal bites to prevent the spread of rabies. Staff work with animal owners, individuals who have been bitten, and animal control agencies to determine the risk of rabies transmission from a bite or other exposure. When necessary, staff coordinate with veterinarians and the state laboratory for rabies testing. SRHD's role is limited to rabies prevention. Animal control agencies investigate and enforce dangerous and potentially dangerous dog laws and ensure compliance for pet licensing and rabies vaccination.

## Rabies Prevention and Animal Bites – Requirements for Animal Owners

If your dog, cat or ferret has been involved in an incident where a human was bitten, or otherwise potentially exposed to rabies, you are required to take the following steps:

- Per Spokane County Code 5.04.160, the animal must be quarantined for 10 days following the date of the incident. Confinement can be with a veterinarian, at an animal shelter, or at home. Animals cannot be allowed to run at large or have contact with other animals or humans. If an animal control officer finds your pet loose during the 10-day period, it will be picked up and held at your expense until the quarantine expires. SRHD staff may contact you at the end of the quarantine to verify that your animal is still healthy.
- Per WAC 246-100-197, you must observe the health of the animal throughout the quarantine period. Do not sell, relocate, vaccinate, or euthanize the animal during this period. If the animal develops any signs of illness, unusual behavior, or dies, you must immediately contact SRHD at 509.324.1560 ext. 7. Arrangements will be made for shipping the animal for rabies testing. Do not damage the head of the animal, freeze, or otherwise handle the body. A negative test result from the Washington State Department of Health Laboratory may prevent the person bitten from undergoing unnecessary rabies post-exposure vaccination.

(Cont.)

*If your dog or cat is a wild animal hybrid, such as a wolf-dog hybrid, and was in contact with a wild animal such as a bat, raccoon or coyote, or has been outside of Washington state within the last six months, SRHD will contact you with additional instructions.*

## Rabies Prevention and Animal Bites – Responsibilities for the Person Bitten

If you've been bitten by an animal, clean the wound with soap and water. Contact your health care provider to determine if additional medical treatment is needed. This is especially important if you have been bitten by a wild animal because rabies can be fatal, and treatment must begin before symptoms appear. Report the bite to the local animal control agency and SRHD.

## Rabies Vaccination

Vaccinating your pet against rabies is required in Washington state. WAC 246-100-197 states: an owner of a dog, cat, or ferret shall have it vaccinated against rabies and revaccinated following veterinary and vaccine manufacturer instructions. An "owner" is any person legally responsible for the care and actions of a pet animal. Learn more about rabies and rabies prevention at [srhd.org/rabies](http://srhd.org/rabies).

## Special Instructions for Bats and Wild Animals

### If you:

- Have any contact with a bat
- Find a bat in your home, even if you do not think you were bitten
- Find your pet with a bat
- Are bitten or scratched by any wild or stray animal

### You should:

- Wash any bite or wound with soap and water.
- Contact your doctor, clinic or emergency room.
- Contact SRHD.
- Safely capture the bat, if possible. Use heavy leather gloves, a heavy towel, or tongs. Put it in a can and cover with a tight lid. Do not damage the head of the bat because the brain is needed for testing. Learn more at [srhd.org/bats](http://srhd.org/bats).



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## Understanding Rabies

### What is rabies?

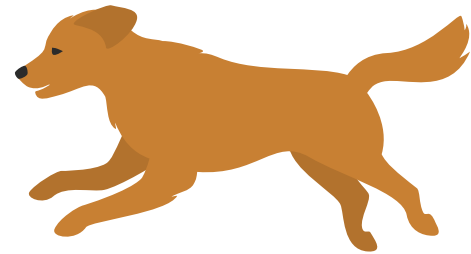
Rabies is a deadly virus that affects the central nervous system. Any warm-blooded mammal, including humans, can get rabies; however, bats are the only animal in Washington known to carry rabies. While rabid raccoons, skunks, foxes or coyotes have not been identified in Washington, the virus can be transmitted from bats to these and other mammals, including dogs and cats.

### How does rabies spread?

The rabies virus is found in the saliva of a rabid animal. It is usually spread to humans by animal bites. Rabies could potentially be spread if the virus comes into contact with open cuts or wounds or mucous membranes, such as in the eyes, nose and respiratory tract. Person-to-person transmission of rabies has occurred only through tissue transplantation.

### How common is rabies in Washington?

There are rabid bats in Washington, including in Spokane County. When people import animals from countries with canine rabies, it increases the likelihood of bringing in infected animals. Each year, about 300 to 600 animals in Washington are tested for rabies—mainly bats. In 2022, 218 bats were tested and eight were infected with rabies. While it is very rare for a person to get rabies in Washington, hundreds of people receive treatment for exposure to rabid or potentially rabid animals every year.



### When was the last time there was a case of rabies in Washington?

Animal control and public health agencies find rabid bats in Washington every year. During the last 20 years, several domestic animals in Washington were diagnosed with rabies. The last reported case of rabies in an animal other than a bat was in 2015 when a cat developed rabies after contact with a rabid bat. The last suspected rabid dog was identified in Pierce County in 1987. In 2007, a rabid puppy imported from another country passed through Washington and exposed several people on its way to another state.

### When was the last human case of rabies in Washington?

The last reported cases of people infected with rabies in Washington were in 1995 and 1997. In 1995, a 4-year-old child died of rabies four weeks after a bat was found in her bedroom. In 1997, a 64-year-old man was diagnosed with rabies. These two Washington residents were infected with bat rabies virus.

### What are the symptoms of rabies?

While early symptoms include headache, fever, and sometimes pain at the site of the exposure (bite), the disease changes quickly into a severe nervous system (neurologic) illness. Symptoms may include agitation, confusion, paralysis, and difficulty swallowing. Once someone with rabies infection starts having these symptoms, that person usually does not survive. Most patients die within a few days or weeks of onset. Symptoms normally appear two to eight weeks after exposure, but this may vary.

