

# New State Zoonotic Disease Laws Affect You

## There is a new state law about vaccinating pets for rabies and more...

A law passed in 2011 gives more protection to people against the deadly disease, rabies, in Washington State. This law took effect on January 1, 2012. With it, another law and changes to existing laws passed to better prevent the spread of disease by animals being sold or exhibited. Here are some key provisions of these laws that you need to know.

### Who do these affect?

These laws primarily affect pet owners, pet store owners, and animal exhibitors responsible for care and handling of certain types of animals.

### What are the benefits?

The laws update and strengthen the state's position to protect people in our state against rabies, salmonellosis, psittacosis, and other diseases animals can pass to people. Together, they form a more comprehensive approach to control disease germs and environments that pose an increased risk to the public. This means better prevention and control of disease outbreaks. Disease outbreaks can affect hundreds of people and be widespread. The response and control of these outbreaks can quickly become costly. Response efforts are often quite involved and take a team of epidemiologists, veterinarians, microbiologists, and other specialists across many local, state, and federal agencies to resolve. These laws implement effective public health interventions that stop disease outbreaks before they start, saving lives and dollars.

### *Rabies is not only deadly, but also expensive.*

*Every year, hundreds of people in Washington State receive treatment, a series of shots, due to potential exposure to rabies. Exposure is often to pets suspected to be rabid. The full series of shots range from \$1,600 to \$5,000. Health insurance usually does not cover the cost. Prevention measures, such as vaccinating pets, avoid illness and save money.*

## What is new?

### RABIES VACCINATION REQUIRED FOR CATS, DOGS, AND FERRETS

Pet owners are now required to vaccinate their cats, dogs, and ferrets against rabies and to keep rabies vaccinations up-to-date. For many pet owners, this may not be new. Certain communities require rabies vaccinations for licensed pets. This law brings our state regulations current with national rabies prevention and control guidelines developed by medical and veterinary experts.

Dogs are still a significant source of rabies in other countries. Pet owners that import a dog from outside the country must follow federal animal importation requirements. An unvaccinated dog may be imported if the owner agrees to properly confine the dog until it is considered adequately vaccinated against rabies. Owners are further required to notify the state health department upon the dogs' arrival in the state.

Other requirements under this law prohibit the import and trade of wildlife—bat, skunk, fox, raccoon, and coyote—commonly known to carry rabies. The law exempts zoological parks, animal exhibitors, and research facilities. However, they must obtain an entry permit through the state agriculture department to import.

### WARNING SIGNS AND HAND WASHING STATIONS REQUIRED AT ANIMAL EXHIBITS

Operators of petting zoos, county fairs, pony rides, or any similar settings that encourage contact with animals must post a warning sign for visitors about the potential risk of disease. They are to provide easy access to hand washing stations, or as an alternative, an approved method using hand sanitizers. Signs reminding visitors to wash their hands must also be posted at each exit of animal exhibit.

At venues, animal exhibitors need to observe their animals daily for any signs of illness. If an animal becomes sick, contact by visitors should be restricted. Exhibitors must follow state requirements for the prevention of rabies and psittacosis, a disease spread by parrots, cockatiels, parakeets, and other psittacine birds.

### POINT-OF-SALE NOTICE OF DISEASE RISK REQUIRED BY PET STORES

Pet stores and other animal vendors must provide buyers with written information about diseases, such as salmonellosis that can be spread by pet reptiles, amphibians, and chicks. This point-of-sale notice should also educate buyers about who is at greater risk and ways to prevent infection.

Under this law, new requirements ban the distribution and sale of small turtles—shells less than four inches long—to help prevent salmonellosis, especially among young children. Also prohibited is the sale of products, such as milk, meat, hides, or hair from animals suspected with anthrax.

Animal vendors of parrots, cockatoos, lovebirds, parakeets and other psittacine birds are also required to provide written information to buyers. The point-of-sale notice is to inform about the dangers of pet birds to carry germs and cause the disease, psittacosis. In birds, it is called avian chlamydiosis. The notice should educate buyers on how this disease spreads and how to recognize illness in both people and pet birds. Vendors must post a sign with this information where it can be easily read.

WAC 246-100-191 Rabies

WAC 246-100-201 Psittacosis

## For more information

Washington State Department of Health, [www.doh.wa.gov](http://www.doh.wa.gov) and search "Zoonotic Disease Rules and Guidelines."

Zoonotic disease means a disease that can spread from animals to people.



Washington State Department of Health  
Zoonotic Disease Program

DOH 333-188 February 2012

For person with disabilities, this document is available on request in other formats. To submit a request, please call 1-888-525-0127 (TDD/TTY 1-800-833-6388).

WAC 246-100-197 Rabies

WAC 246-100-191 Animals

# What are my responsibilities?

## PET OWNERS

Vaccinating pets is the best way to protect people and pets against rabies. Before the availability of rabies vaccines, pets commonly became infected with rabies. Today, approved vaccines are available for cats, dogs, and ferrets. It is important that you make sure your pets are up to date on their rabies vaccinations. Pets that have not received a rabies vaccination and are exposed to rabies must be quarantined for six months, or put down.

- ⦿ Have your veterinarian vaccinate your cat, dog, and ferret against rabies. Your veterinarian will provide you with a certificate as proof that your pet has been vaccinated.
- ⦿ Keep your pet's rabies vaccination current. Ask your veterinarian about the best vaccination schedule for your pet. A booster shot is needed within one year after the first vaccination and subsequent booster shots typically every three years.

Other ways you can help control rabies:

- ⦿ Bat-proof your house and other structures to prevent bats from roosting and having contact with your family and pets.
- ⦿ Don't handle or let your pet near wild or stray animals, especially bats. Don't keep wild animals as pets.
- ⦿ Don't leave garbage or pet food outside. It may attract wild and stray animals.
- ⦿ Report any wild or stray animal acting strangely to your local animal control.

## ANIMAL VENUE OPERATORS

Every year, many people become sick because of a visit to an animal exhibit such as petting zoo and county fair. This is because visitors are often unaware that healthy animals can carry germs that are harmful. They forget to wash their hands after petting an animal or bring food or drink into an area where animals are being housed. As an animal venue operator, your responsibility is to educate visitors on how to keep safe and healthy while visiting the animal exhibit.

- ⦿ Provide hand washing stations at the exit of the animal exhibit. Make sure hand washing stations are easily accessible, especially by children. An alternative hand sanitizing method may be used, if approved by the local health officials.
- ⦿ Post a noticeable sign for visitors to read before they enter the animal exhibit. The signs must be simple and easy to understand and must warn that:
  - Animals can carry germs that can make people sick, even animals that appear healthy,
  - Eating, drinking, or putting things in a person's mouth in animal areas could cause illness,
  - Older adults, pregnant women, immunocompromised people, and young children are more likely to become ill from contact with animals,
  - Young children and individuals with intellectual disabilities should be supervised in animal exhibit areas, and
  - Strollers, baby bottles, pacifiers, and children's toys are not recommended in animal exhibit areas.
- ⦿ Post a noticeable sign at each exit of the animal exhibit reminding visitors to wash their hands.

## ANIMAL VENDORS

Over the years, numerous disease outbreaks have been associated with the distribution and sale of certain pets. Several recent widespread outbreaks of salmonellosis were linked to contact with chicks and water frogs. These outbreaks caused illness in hundreds of people. To help prevent such outbreaks, pet stores and other animal vendors are required to provide buyers with health-related information at the point of purchase.

Animal vendors of pet reptiles, amphibians, and poultry chicks must:

- ⦿ Provide buyer with written information that includes:
  - Possible diseases spread by reptiles, amphibians, or poultry chick, such as salmonellosis,
  - Who is at greater risk for contracting and experiencing severe illness related to contact with reptiles, amphibians, and poultry chicks, such as young children, the elderly, and immunocompromised persons, and
  - Disease prevention messages, such as proper hand washing and recommendations for high risk groups.

Animal vendors of psittacine birds—parrots, cockatoos, parakeets, and any other birds from the order Psittaciformes must:

- ⦿ Provide buyer with written information about psittacosis and avian chlamydiosis that includes:
  - Signs of infection in a sick bird including nasal discharge, sneezing, coughing, ruffled feathers, lethargy, and diarrhea,
  - Symptoms of psittacosis in a person including chills, fever, headache, cough, and muscle aches,
  - A warning that nasal discharge and droppings of an infected or sick bird may cause illness in people,
  - A warning that healthy appearing birds can shed the harmful germs that can cause psittacosis intermittently and that shedding can be activated by stress factors such as relocation, shipping, crowding, chilling, and breeding, and
  - A recommendation to consult a veterinarian or health care provider, as appropriate, if signs or symptoms occur.
- ⦿ Post a readable sign for the public with the above information on psittacosis and avian chlamydiosis.

## EDUCATION MATERIALS FOR ANIMAL VENUE OPERATORS AND ANIMAL VENDORS

Create your own signs and informational handouts or use our education materials available at Washington State Department of Health, [www.doh.wa.gov](http://www.doh.wa.gov). Search "Zoonotic Disease Rules and Guidelines."