



# News Release

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## Animal-carried illnesses can mess up your spring cleaning

**OLYMPIA** — The time for spring cleaning is here, and with it, the risk of exposure to serious animal-carried diseases like hantavirus and rabies. The Department of Health recommends taking precautions when cleaning areas where wild animals may have been. Visible droppings, nests, dead rodents or bats are signs of animals that can carry these dangerous diseases.

“Although these illnesses are rare, they can be deadly,” says State Health Officer Dr. Maxine Hayes. “By taking a few simple steps, people can protect themselves from being exposed.”

Hantavirus is spread by deer mice that excrete the virus in their urine, saliva, and droppings. A person may be exposed to hantavirus by breathing contaminated dust after disturbing or cleaning rodent droppings or nests, or by living or working in rodent-infested settings.

Each year, usually one to three people in our state contract hantavirus pulmonary syndrome and about one-third of those who get it die. Last year, two people developed the disease and both of them died. The illness is more common in eastern Washington, although cases have been exposed throughout most of the state.

Early symptoms of the disease include fever, muscle aches, and fatigue. Some people may also experience chills, nausea, vomiting or abdominal pain. The illness progresses within a few days to shortness of breath, then to very serious respiratory distress requiring hospitalization. There’s no vaccine, specific treatment, or cure for the illness.

To help prevent hantavirus, [keep rodents out of your home](#), garage, and other buildings. Avoid activities such as sweeping and vacuuming that can stir-up dust in areas where rodents have been. Spray 10 percent bleach on rodent-contaminated areas and allow it to soak in for at least 10

minutes before carefully wiping up and disposing of the mess. Our website has [guidelines for cleaning areas where rodents](#) have been.

Rabies is another rare, yet serious animal-carried disease. Rabies is thought to be in about one percent of all bats. However, bats that interact with humans tend to be sick or injured, and of those, we find about five to 10 percent are rabid. Bats with rabies have been found in every part of Washington. In 2012, nine rabid bats were identified in Chelan, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Island, King, Skagit, Snohomish, Wahkiakum, and Whatcom counties.

Don't touch bats. If you find a bat in your living space or have any direct contact with a bat in any location, call your [local health agency](#). They can help determine whether you have had a possible exposure to rabies or not, and if necessary, they can advise you on how to safely capture a bat so it can be tested for rabies. "[Bat proof](#)" your home to prevent them from entering in the first place.

Since pet vaccination for rabies has become common, the disease is very rare among pets in the U.S. Rabid animals usually show abnormal behavior, such as aggression, confusion, or lack of fear of people. In Washington, [rabies vaccination](#) is required for all dogs, cats, and ferrets.

Take precautions to prevent the spread of animal-carried diseases and take the opportunity to ensure that when your spring tidying is complete, you still have a clean bill of health.

The [Department of Health website](#) (doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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