



News Release

For immediate release: July 24, 2014

(14-104)

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Rabid bats are a risk in Washington

Protect yourself, your pets, and the community by vaccinating pets and avoiding wild animals

OLYMPIA — Rabid bats have been found throughout the state and continue to pose a risk to people and pets, especially during the summer when bats are more active. Five bats that were in contact with people or pets have tested positive for rabies so far this year. This is fairly normal, but health officials are hoping to raise awareness and keep this number low.

“There’s an ongoing risk of people and pets interacting with wild animals, including rabid bats,” said Ron Wohrle, veterinarian at the Department of Health. “To help protect yourself and your pets, avoid contact with bats or wild animals and enjoy wildlife from a distance.”

Though 1 percent of bats carry the rabies virus, people are more likely to [come into contact with sick bats](#). Healthy bats usually avoid contact with people and animals and will not rest on the ground. Bats that fly erratically, come out during the day, or hang out on the ground or in bushes and otherwise act strangely may be rabid. Between 200 and 350 bats from Washington are tested each year following human or pet exposure – 5 percent to 10 percent of these bats typically test positive for rabies.

About 250 to 300 people per year in our state undergo a series of painful and expensive shots after they’ve had contact with a rabid bat or have been exposed to a potentially infected animal. Prompt preventive medication is crucial — rabies is deadly once a person or animal begins to show symptoms, yet it can be prevented with appropriate medical care.

Bites or wounds from any animal should be washed right away with soap and water, and medical attention should be sought. Any bite, scratch, or other direct contact with a bat should be carefully evaluated by a health professional. Consultation is needed if a bat is found in a room with a small child, an intoxicated or mentally incapacitated person, or a sleeping person who

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cannot reliably be sure they were not bitten. Bat teeth are very small and a bite might not leave visible marks or be felt by a sleeping person. Call the local health agency in your community for help determining if any people or pets in your home may have been exposed. They can help arrange to test the bat for rabies, if needed, and provide advice on whether rabies preventive medications are necessary.

Washington requires all cats, dogs, and ferrets be vaccinated for rabies. Pets are also at risk for infection when they encounter wild animals. Protecting pets by keeping their rabies shots current is an important buffer between the disease and people. Even indoor animals should be vaccinated, since rabid bats have been found inside homes where pets live. People should avoid contact with wildlife, and children should be taught not to touch animals they don't know, even if it appears friendly.

The [Department of Health website](http://www.doh.wa.gov) (www.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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