



# News Release

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## **Rabies exposure risk rises in summer months**

*Parents and pet owners can help with rabies prevention*

**OLYMPIA** — In summer months, the risk of exposure to rabies rises as bat activity increases, people and pets spend more time outdoors, and doors and windows are opened. Avoiding contact with bats and vaccinating pets are the keys to reducing the risk of rabies.

Tracking shows the rabies virus has been detected in bats throughout Washington, and public health officials are urging everyone to help with [rabies prevention](#). It's crucial to teach children never to touch bats and explain the dangers bats pose, remind everyone to avoid contact with bats, and vaccinate pets to help prevent exposure.

In Washington, the last human exposure resulting in death was in 1997. However, rabies risk is always present in Washington; for instance, two rabid bats have been identified to date during 2015, in Spokane and Thurston Counties. Bats anywhere in the state can be positive. Last year, more than 230 people in Washington were advised to get vaccinated to prevent rabies after actual or suspected exposure to rabid bats or other animals.

Immediate treatment after exposure can prevent the deadly disease in humans. In almost all human cases, untreated exposure to rabies leads to brain infection and death. Treatment after rabies exposure involves a series of shots over a two-to-four week period and costs several thousand dollars.

Bats are the most common source of rabies in our state and over the past two decades, an average of 20 bats per year in Washington have tested positive for the rabies virus. Last year, 435 bats were tested for rabies and 15 had the virus. Although bats are the most common source for this disease, all mammals, including dogs and cats, can get the illness. These other mammals, if infected, can also be a source of infection to people.

— More —

Washington requires all dogs, cats, and ferrets be vaccinated against rabies. High pet vaccination rates across the U.S. make rabies far less common than in countries where vaccination isn't as prevalent. Globally, more than 50,000 people die from the disease every year. Washington health officials remind pet owners to vaccinate pets. Cats are at higher risk of exposure because they're natural hunters and bats can be their prey. If your pet catches or brings home a bat, contact your local health agency immediately.

All other potential exposures to bats, including animal bites, should be reported to local health officials without delay; this includes finding a bat in your home, especially in an infant or child's room or a room where someone is sleeping. If the bat is still in your home, try to safely contain it until you've spoken to local health staff. They'll help determine if any people or pets in the home may have been exposed and can arrange to test the bat for rabies. Because bats have such small teeth, bites might not be apparent. In Washington, unknown bat contact has led to rabies infection and tragically, in 1995, the death of a young child.

Capturing a bat must be done carefully. Don't touch the bat with your bare hands. Instead, close all doors and windows and wait for the bat to land on the floor or wall. Then, while wearing thick gloves, capture the bat in a can or box, again without touching it. Seal the container and then contact your [local health agency](#).

More tips such as how to "[bat proof](#)" your home and other ways to protect your family and pets from rabies can be found on the [Department of Health's Rabies webpage](#).

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