



# News Release

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## **Bats begin hibernation in fall; now is the time to “bat-proof” your home**

*Prevent bats from roosting in your attic, garage, or cabin by covering entry points*

**OLYMPIA** -- When temperatures begin dropping, bats search for places to stay warm for the winter, increasing chances of contact with people. Their hibernation sites can include attics in homes, cabins, and outbuildings. The Department of Health suggests people “bat-proof” their homes now to keep bats and the rabies virus they may be carrying outside.

Bats carrying the rabies virus have been found almost everywhere in Washington. So far this year, nine bats from seven counties – Clark, King, Mason, Pacific, Snohomish, Spokane, and Thurston – were positive for the rabies virus out of 280 bats tested. Every year hundreds of Washingtonians undergo a series of shots to prevent rabies, which is deadly if not treated, after they were possibly exposed to the virus. Bites from infected bats or other mammals can expose people and pets to the rabies virus. Bats’ teeth are very small so bite marks might not be obvious and can disappear quickly.

Rabies circulates in a small percent of the state’s bat population; less than 1 in every 100 bats in the wild are estimated to carry the virus. Pets are more likely than people to have direct contact with wild animals, including bats. Cats are natural predators and more inclined to make contact with a rabid bat. Pet vaccination is the best way to keep pets and their owners from contracting this fatal illness and to avoid a lengthy pet quarantine or euthanasia if a pet encounters a rabid bat or other animal.

Steps to avoid rabies from bats or other mammals:

- **“Bat-proof”** your home by sealing all cracks, crevices, or holes larger than a quarter-inch with caulk. Use screens on windows, chimney caps, and draft-guards beneath doors to attics to keep them out of your living area.

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- Avoid handling bats. Teach children to never touch bats or other unfamiliar animals, wild or tame. Bats acting strangely are more likely to have the virus.
- Report animal bites to your local health department. They’re trained to help you determine if the bite is a potential rabies exposure.
- If bitten by a bat, clean the bite area with soap and water. Try to safely capture the bat in case testing is required. Contact your health care provider and [local health department](#) to determine the potential risk for rabies, the need for treatment, and whether to test the bat for rabies.
- Make sure your cat, dog, and ferret are [vaccinated as required](#) by Washington State rules. If you think your pet was bitten by a bat, or if your pet is found playing with a bat, call your veterinarian.

In some situations, you should seek medical advice even if there’s no obvious bite wound.

Examples include a bat landing on you, waking up and finding a bat in your room, or finding a bat near an unattended child or a person who is mentally impaired, or someone intoxicated. In these situations, try to safely capture the bat for testing, and get medical advice.

More information about bats and rabies can be found on the agency [rabies webpage](#) including how to bat-proof your home. The state [Department of Fish and Wildlife](#) also has information about keeping unwanted bats out.

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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