



Bats are beneficial to people and the environment, but they can carry and transmit rabies, a fatal disease. Learn how to reduce the risk of exposure to rabies for you and your family.



Bats benefit humans and the environment as they are effective predators of night-flying insects (including mosquitoes), and act as pollinators of plants and trees. Unfortunately, bats can carry rabies, a deadly virus, which means close contact with bats should be avoided—including bare-handed contact.

One way people come in contact with bats is when bats enter the house through unscreened doors and windows left open at night during warm months. All doors and windows should be screened to prevent bat entry. Find out more about bat-proofing a home on BatSmart – Home Safe.

People also come in to contact with bats when pets catch a bat and bring it into the home. Pet doors should be closed at night and all cats, dogs, and ferrets must be vaccinated for rabies. Find out more about vaccinating and keeping pets safe from rabies on BatSmart – Pet Safe.

## Rabies in Washington State

Rabies is a deadly virus that affects the central nervous system. Any warm-blooded mammal, including humans, can get rabies; however, bats are the only animal in Washington state known to carry rabies. The rabies virus is found in the saliva of a rabid animal. It is usually spread

to humans by animal bites and can also be spread if the virus comes in contact with the eyes, nose, mouth, open cuts, or wounds.

The primary carrier of rabies in the Northwest is bats. Rabid bats have been found in every county in Washington, including Spokane County. Between 3-10% of bats submitted for testing are found to be rabid, while rabies occurs in less than 1% of the whole bat population. In 2016, of 297 bats tested for rabies in the state, 20 rabid bats were identified, including 3 in Spokane County.

A potential rabies exposure between a human and a bat should never be taken lightly. Every year, people in the state receive treatment for exposure to rabid or potentially rabid animals. Bats can also spread rabies to pets and other animals. In Washington, the last rabies cases reported in cats and dogs were in 2015 and 2002 (cats) and 1987 (a dog).

## Reducing the Risk of Rabies Exposure

- Do not handle wild animals, especially bats.
- Do not keep wild animals as pets.
- Teach children never to touch or handle bats, even dead ones. Have children tell an adult if they find a bat at home, at school, or with a pet.
- If outside in the evening or entering structures frequented by bats, cover up with a head covering and clothing.

### *Animal Bites*

If a person is bitten by any animal they should clean the wound with soap and water, then contact their health care provider to determine if additional medical treatment is needed. It is very important to talk to a health care provider right away, especially if bitten by a wild animal, as rabies treatment must begin before symptoms appear or the person usually does not survive.

Next, report the bite to local animal control officials, who will contact Spokane Regional Health District to determine the potential for rabies exposure, the need for rabies treatment, and whether or not to test the animal for rabies. Dogs, cats, and ferrets can be quarantined for 10 days after a biting incident, and if healthy at the end of the quarantine period, then rabies could not have been transmitted to the bite victim.

# Special Instructions for Bats and Wild Animals

<i>If a person:</i>	<i>They should:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Has any contact with a bat.</li><li>• Finds a bat in the home, even if they do not feel they were bitten.</li><li>• Finds a pet with a bat.</li><li>• Is bitten or scratched by any wild or stray animal.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wash any bite or wound with soap and water.</li><li>• Contact their health care provider.</li><li>• Contact Spokane Regional Health District.</li><li>• Safely capture the bat, if possible. Use heavy leather gloves, a heavy towel, or tongs. Put it in a can and cover with a tight lid. Do not damage the head of the bat because the brain is needed for testing. (See additional instructions below.)</li></ul>

## When a Bat Gets Inside the Home

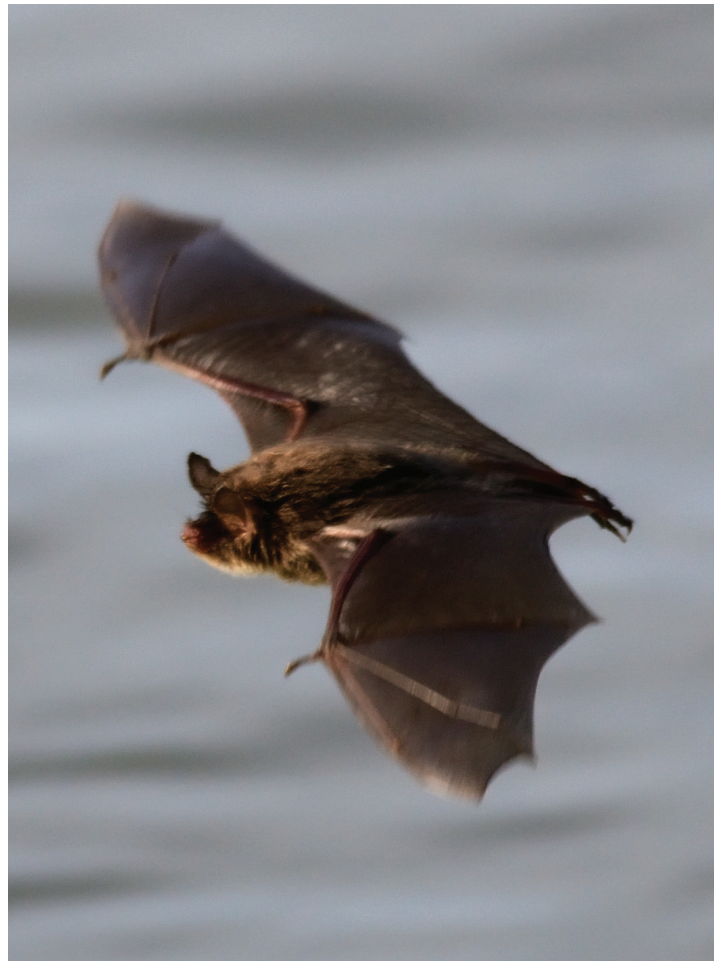
### *Potential Contact with Humans*

If a bat enters the home, there could be potential contact with humans. Bats have small teeth and claws so any bite or scratch marks may be difficult to see. Contact Spokane Regional Health District at 509.324.1560, ext. 7 to determine if the bat needs to be caught and tested for rabies.

Contact a health care provider, under the following circumstances, even in the absence of an obvious bite or scratch:

- A bat is found in a room or had access to a room with a sleeping person (e.g. bedroom door open to a hallway).
- A bat is found in a room with an unattended child.
- A bat is found in a room with a person under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or who has another sensory or mental impairment.
- A bat is found near a child outside.

If the health district requires the bat to be collected for rabies testing, follow the instructions below to safely capture the bat. **Never handle a bat with bare hands.**



## Safely Capturing Bats

Only capture bats that have had direct contact with a person or pet, or if the bat was found in a room where it may have come in contact with a person or a pet (e.g., while they were sleeping) or if direct contact cannot be ruled out. Do not release a live bat or throw out a dead bat unless Spokane Regional Health District staff determine that it is not necessary to test the bat. Testing the bat may be important to decide whether the exposed person(s) will require treatment to prevent rabies. To safely capture a bat, follow these steps:

1. Never handle a bat with bare hands. Wear leather or thick rubber work gloves.
2. If the bat is still flying, gently strike it with a broom or tennis racket to knock it down, or capture it with a net or cover it with a towel. If a bat is in a pet's mouth, try using tongs to remove it. **The brain needs to be in good condition for testing, so do not smash the bat's head.**
3. Wait until the bat has landed, then place an empty can, small box, or food storage dish over the bat. Slide cardboard under the container to contain the bat.
4. Carefully replace the cardboard with the container's lid to securely keep the bat contained, or tape the cardboard over the top. Make sure the top is firmly attached to the container so the bat will not escape. Punch small air holes in the lid of the container (about 2-3 mm) using a nail or small screwdriver.
5. Place the container in a quiet area away from heavy human or animal activity. Do not refrigerate, freeze, or kill a live bat.
6. If the bat is dead or injured and not flying, pick it up with a shovel or dust pan and place it in a container.
7. Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water.
8. Contact Spokane Regional Health District at (509) 324-1560, ext. 7, to answer questions about contact between the bat and people or pets.
9. Always keep the bat in the container until the health district decides whether the bat needs to be tested for rabies.
  - o If the bat needs to be tested for rabies, the health district will make the necessary arrangements and provide instructions.
  - o If the health district determines there is no need to test the bat, then the bat may be carefully released outdoors.

## Disposing of a Dead Bat that Does Not Need Testing

- Wear heavy protective gloves.
- Pick the bat up with a shovel, or other cleanable or disposable implement.
- Place the bat in a plastic bag and tie closed or place in a disposable plastic container and close the lid.
- Double-bag the contained/bagged bat in another plastic bag.
- Place in a tightly secured garbage container that children and pets cannot access.
- Disinfect the collection implement with a 10% bleach solution (1/4 cup of 5.25% household bleach in 2 ¼ cups of water).
- Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water.
- Wash or dispose of the gloves.

## Contact Us

**Spokane Regional Health District Zoonotic Disease Program: 509.324.1560, ext. 7**

**Additional Handouts:** BatSmart - Pet Safe, BatSmart - Home Safe, BatSmart - Bats & Rabies

## Resources

*To report animal bites*

**Spokane County Regional Animal Protection Service (SCRAPS) 509.477.2533**

<http://www.spokanecounty.org/567/SCRAPS---Regional-Animal-Protection>

*Washington State Department of Health*  
**Bats and rabies, capturing a bat, etc.**

[doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/Rabies](http://doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/Rabies)

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*  
**Bats and Rabies, bat-proofing your home, etc.**  
[cdc.gov/rabies/bats/index.html](http://cdc.gov/rabies/bats/index.html)

*Adapted from Washington State Department of Health rabies website.*