### Algorithm

**Washington State Human Rabies Prevention Algorithm**

- **All suspected rabies exposures (to people)** must be immediately reported to the local health jurisdiction (LHJ) per WAC 246-101. This includes reporting of all persons to whom rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is administered.

- **Consultations and animal testing** are available from the LHJ. Healthcare providers are encouraged to consult LHJs prior to initiating PEP.

- **Rabies exposures include** bites, scratches, and fresh wounds or mucous membranes contaminated with a mammal’s saliva or neural tissue. Touching animal fur, blood, urine, or feces is not a rabies exposure. Non-mammals, e.g., birds and reptiles, do not get rabies. **Bat exposures†** deserve special consideration.

### Risk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal type</th>
<th>Geographic location of exposure</th>
<th>Notify LHJ</th>
<th>Animal testing recommendation</th>
<th>PEP recommendation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HIGH</strong></td>
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</table>
| Any rabid-acting* mammal | Anywhere | Yes | Test if available. | - If animal tests positive, OR if unable to test, give PEP immediately.  
- If bite to head/neck from any animal highly suspected to be rabid, give PEP immediately.  
- If non-severe bite to other area (e.g., extremities) from any animal, PEP can be delayed 24-48 hours while animal is tested. |
| Bat† | | | | |
| Wild carnivore (e.g., raccoon, skunk, fox, coyote, wolf, or hybrid) | In area with endemic rabies in wild carnivores (not WA) | Yes | Confine and observe for 10 days.§ If signs of rabies* develop during observation, call LHJ for immediate testing (see rabid-acting* mammal above). | |
| **MEDIUM** | | | | |
| Dog, cat, or ferret with normal appearance & behavior. (Does not apply to hybrids, e.g. wolf-dogs.) | In or imported in past 6 months from rabies endemic area including Asia, Africa, Middle East, South/Central America, or Mexico | Yes | Confine and observe for 10 days.§ If signs of rabies* develop during observation, call LHJ for immediate testing (see rabid-acting* mammal above). | - If tests positive or if unable to observe or test, give PEP.  
- If observing, consider starting PEP immediately given elevated risk; can discontinue if animal survives 10-day observation. |
| Wild animal hybrids (e.g., wolf-dogs) | In Washington | Yes | Generally test if available.  
See special considerations for hybrids. | |
| Raccoons | In Washington | Yes | Test if available. | |
| Other wild carnivores | In Washington | Yes | Test if available. | |
| **LOW** | | | | |
| Dog, cat, or ferret (D/C/F) with normal appearance & behavior. (Does not apply to hybrids, e.g., wolf-dogs.) | In the U.S. (or a country not known to be endemic for canine rabies) | No|^ | - If signs of rabies develop during observation, call LHJ for immediate testing (see rabid-acting* mammal).  
- Animal euthanized due to chronic illness or injuries, or unwanted D/C/F:  
  - If feral/stray then test.  
  - If owned, test if unprovoked or D/C/F had known exposure to bat/rabid animal; otherwise victim can waive testing if provoked. | |
| **VERY LOW** | | | | |
| Rodent, hare/rabbit, or opossum | Anywhere | No|^ | No need to test unless rabid-acting*. Consult with LHJ if thought to be rabid; livestock should be evaluated by a veterinarian. | PEP not recommended unless animal tests positive or unable to test a rabid-acting* animal; consult LHJ in such cases. |

**NOTE:** See definitions and explanations on next page.
Algorithm

* Rabid-acting: Rabies virus causes an acute, rapidly progressive encephalitis. Observing unusual behavior or unhealthy appearance is a proxy to identify potentially rabid animals. Behavior changes and neurologic signs exhibited are variable based on species and stage of disease progression. In terrestrial mammals, suggestive signs include a sudden change in behavior, such as: being unusually withdrawn, stuporous or agitated; acting inappropriately aggressive or attempting to bite; approaching people (wild animals only); attacking inanimate objects; making abnormal vocalizations; stumbling or appearing weak; displaying muscle tremors, seizures, or difficulty swallowing; appearing afraid of water; salivating profusely (foaming at the mouth); and staring blankly or appearing to be blind. Livestock may also display head-pressing, circling, depression, drooping head or ears, or constant bellowing, or may isolate themselves from herd mates.

† Bats: An exposure assessment is necessary when a bat is found in a room with a person who cannot say that exposure did not occur (e.g., unattended infant or child, intoxicated adult, sleeping person). Bat bites may not leave visible marks. See Appendix A for additional information on exposure assessments related to bats.

‡ Observations: Local health jurisdiction (LHJ) policy may differ as to whether dog/cat/ferret (D/C/F) observation should be done in home or with animal control. If D/C/F becomes ill or dies during observation, a veterinarian should be consulted to evaluate for rabies and the LHJ should be notified immediately.

§ Notifying LHJ: In general, low risk bites/exposures from dogs, cats, and ferrets in Washington and rodents, rabbits, opossum, and livestock are not reportable to the LHJ. However if PEP is given or animal shows signs of rabies, then exposure must be reported to the LHJ.

Legal reporting requirements in Washington State regulation (WAC 246-101-101 and -301)

- All healthcare providers, healthcare facilities, and veterinarians are required to immediately notify the local health jurisdiction (LHJ) regarding suspected rabies exposures, including: (1) “Animal bites (when human exposure to rabies is suspected),” and (2) “Rabies, suspected human exposure (suspected human rabies exposure due to a bite from or other exposure to an animal that is suspected to be rabid)”

The algorithm is intended to be a guide in determining whether an exposure to rabies should be suspected and whether reporting to the LHJ is necessary.

Washington State rabies facts

- Bats are currently the only known reservoir for rabies in Washington State.
  - Rabies is not known to be endemic in raccoons, skunks, foxes, or other wild carnivores in this state; however surveillance for rabies in wild carnivores is minimal in Washington.
  - Rarely, other animals are bitten by rabid bats and may become rabid in Washington State; examples since 1988 include horse, llama, and two cats.

- Animals incubating or infected with rabies could be accidently imported into Washington State.
  - Animals potentially exposed: Environmental Health Zoonotic Disease Program, 360-236-3385 (M-F, 8 am – 4 pm); if unavailable call Epidemiology

Criteria for assessing risk of rabies exposure

- Consider the following: (1) animal type and health/behavior (see rabid-acting*); (2) geographic location of exposure or geographic origin of the animal; (3) animal vaccination status; (4) circumstances of exposure (provoked* vs. unprovoked); (5) likelihood the animal could have been exposed to another rabid animal (outdoor vs. indoor animal; travel/import history of animal; feral/stray vs. pet).

- If you are unsure, consultations are available from your LHJ. If unable to reach LHJ, call DOH Communicable Disease Epidemiology (see below).

Wound care

- Wound cleansing is important in rabies prevention. In animal studies, thorough wound cleansing with soap and water alone has been shown to reduce the likelihood of developing rabies.

References and additional resources

- WASHINGTON STATE:
  - Local health jurisdiction contact information: [http://www.doh.wa.gov/AboutUs/PublicHealthSystem/LocalHealthJurisdictions.aspx](http://www.doh.wa.gov/AboutUs/PublicHealthSystem/LocalHealthJurisdictions.aspx)
  - Washington State Department of Health (only contact if unable to reach LHJ):
    - Humans potentially exposed: Office of Communicable Disease Epidemiology, 877-539-4344 or 206-418-5500 (24/7 on-call service)
    - Animals potentially exposed: Environmental Health Zoonotic Disease Program, 360-236-3385 (M-F, 8 am – 4 pm); if unavailable call Epidemiology
