



## ZOONOTIC DISEASE PROGRAM

# Rabies Prevention and Animal Bites

---

## Spokane Regional Health District and Animal Bites

Spokane Regional Health District investigates animal bites in order to prevent the spread of rabies. We work with animal owners, bite victims and animal control agencies to determine the risk of rabies transmission from a bite or other exposure. When necessary, we coordinate with veterinarians and the state laboratory for rabies testing. Our role is limited to rabies prevention. Animal control agencies will investigate and enforce dangerous and potentially dangerous dog laws as well as ensure compliance for pet licensing and rabies vaccination.

## Rabies Prevention and Animal Bites – Requirements for Animal Owners

**If your dog, cat or ferret has been involved in an incident where a human was scratched or bitten, Washington State law requires the following:**

- **The animal must be quarantined for ten days following the date of the incident.** Confinement can be with a veterinarian, at an animal shelter, or at home. In no case can the animal be allowed to run at large or have contact with other animals or humans, except for watering and feeding. This quarantine is to prevent additional exposures in case your animal has rabies. *If an animal control officer finds your pet loose during the ten-day period, it will be picked up and held, at your expense, until the quarantine expires.* Spokane Regional Health District staff may contact you at the end of the quarantine to verify that your animal is still healthy.
- During quarantine you must look for any signs of illness or unusual behavior. **Do not sell, relocate, vaccinate, or euthanize the animal during this period. If the animal becomes ill or dies, you must immediately report all details to Spokane Regional Health District at 324-1560, ext. 7, or the appropriate animal control agency.** Arrangements will be made for shipping the animal for rabies testing. Do not damage the head of the animal, freeze, or otherwise handle the body. *If the animal is damaged and untestable, you may be responsible for shipping charges and the costs of any human rabies vaccinations that are necessary.* A negative test result from the Washington State Department of Health Laboratory may prevent a bite victim from undergoing unnecessary rabies vaccination.

*If your dog or cat is hybrid with a wild animal (e.g., wolf-dog hybrid), was in contact with a wild animal such as a bat, raccoon, or coyote, or has been outside of WA State within the last six months, Spokane Regional Health District will contact you with additional instructions.*

## Rabies Prevention and Animal Bites – Animal Bite Victim Responsibilities

**If you've been bitten by an animal, clean the wound** with soap and water. **Contact your health care provider** to determine if additional medical treatment is needed. **Report the bite** to the local animal control agency, 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. It is very important to talk to your doctor or health care provider right away if any animal bites you, especially a wild animal, because rabies treatment must begin before symptoms appear or the person usually does not survive.

Learn more about rabies and rabies prevention at:

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/Rabies.aspx>

Environmental Public Health – Zoonotic Disease Program

1101 West College Ave., Rm. 402, Spokane, WA 99201-2095 | 509.324.1560 | TDD 324.1464 | FAX 324.3603 | [www.srhd.org](http://www.srhd.org) | 05/2014

## Special Instructions for Bats and Wild Animals

<b>If you:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Have any contact</b> with a bat</li><li>• <b>Find a bat in your home</b>, even if you do not think you were bitten</li><li>• <b>Find your pet with a bat</b></li><li>• <b>Are bitten or scratched</b> by any wild or stray animal</li></ul>	<b>You should:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Wash</b> any bite or wound with soap and water.</li><li>• <b>Contact</b> your doctor, clinic or emergency room.</li><li>• <b>Contact</b> Spokane Regional Health District.</li><li>• <b>Safely capture</b> 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.</li></ul>
---	--

## Understanding Rabies

**What is rabies?** 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 known to *carry* rabies. While rabid raccoons, skunks, foxes or coyotes have not been identified in Washington, the virus can be transmitted from bats to these and other mammals, including dogs and cats.

**How is rabies spread?** The rabies virus is found in the saliva of a rabid animal. It is usually spread to humans by animal bites. Rabies could potentially be spread if the virus comes into contact with mucous membranes (eyes, nose, respiratory tract, etc.), open cuts or wounds. Person-to-person transmission of rabies has occurred only through tissue transplantation.

**How common is rabies in Washington?** We have rabid bats in Washington, including Spokane County. When people import animals from countries with dog rabies, it increases the potential of bringing in rabid animals. Each year, about 400 to 600 animals in Washington are tested for rabies, mostly bats. In 2012, 221 bats were tested and 9 were infected with rabies. It is very rare for a person to get rabies in Washington; however, hundreds of people receive treatment for exposure to rabid or potentially rabid animals every year.

**When was the last time there was a case of rabies in Washington?** We find rabid bats in Washington every year. During the last 20 years, several domestic animals in Washington were diagnosed with rabies. The last reported case of rabies in an animal other than a bat in our state was in 2002 when a cat developed rabies after catching a rabid bat. The last suspected rabid dog was identified in Pierce County in 1987. (In 2007, a rabid puppy imported from another country *passed through* Washington and exposed several people on its way to another state.)

**When was the last human case of rabies in Washington?** The last reported cases of people infected with rabies in Washington were in 1995 and 1997. In 1995, a four-year-old child died of rabies four weeks after a bat was found in her bedroom; and in 1997, a 64-year-old man was diagnosed with rabies. These two Washington residents were infected with bat rabies virus.

**What are the symptoms of rabies?** While early symptoms include headache, fever, and sometimes pain at the site of the exposure (bite), the disease changes quickly into a severe nervous system (neurologic) illness. Symptoms may include agitation, confusion, paralysis, and difficulty swallowing. Once someone with rabies infection starts having these symptoms, that person usually does not survive. Most patients die within a few days or weeks of onset. Symptoms normally appear two to eight weeks after exposure, but this may vary.

## Rabies Vaccinations

**Vaccinating your pet against rabies is required in Washington state.** [WAC 246-100-197](#) states: *an owner of a dog, cat, or ferret shall have it vaccinated against rabies and revaccinated following veterinary and vaccine manufacturer instructions. An "owner" is any person legally responsible for the care and actions of a pet animal.*