

BATS AND RABIES PREVENTION

Overview

Washington state is home to many bats, the majority of which are healthy and vital to our ecosystem. A small portion of bats carry the rabies virus. The virus is in the bat's saliva and brain tissue, and can be spread to people through a bite, scratch, or other contact with a mucous membrane, wound, or non-intact skin

What is Rabies?

Rabies is a preventable disease caused by a virus that infects the brain and spinal cord. The disease can be prevented if treatment is given before symptoms appear. If untreated, rabies almost always leads to death.

Rabies & Humans

There are only 1-2 cases of human rabies reported in the U.S. each year, about 70% of which are caused by bat exposures. However, many cases of rabies are prevented through medical treatment following animal bites.

If you or someone you know has had contact with a bat or potentially rabid animal, contact your health care provider and local health department right away.

Staying Safe

- Stay away from bats and do not touch them. A scratch or bite from a bat can expose you to rabies.
- If you find a bat inside, follow proper safety precautions which can be found on doh.wa.gov or your local health jurisdiction website. You can also call animal control or a wildlife conservation agency for assistance.
- You can find resources to bat-proof your house on doh.wa.gov, which include caulking any openings, maintaining intact screens on all windows and doors when open, and ensuring your doors close tightly.

Bats

In Washington, bats are the only known source (reservoir) of rabies. Most bats do not have rabies, but all contact with bats should be avoided to prevent exposure to rabies virus. Infected bats may display unusual behavior. Some signs of a sick bat include:

- Inability to fly
- Flying during the daytime
- Making a lot of noise

Healthy bats typically avoid contact with humans or animals and are usually not found resting on the ground.



Big Brown Bat | WA Department of Fish and Wildlife

Bats are important to us and to nature

Bats play an important role in the balance of nature. They eat insects, helping to control pests. Bat droppings (called guano) are a source of nitrogen-rich fertilizers. Bats also play a role in pollination.

For more information visit doh.wa.gov, call 206-418-5500, or email zd.doh.wa.gov.



DOH 420-462 2022 To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 (Washington Relay) or email doh.information@doh.wa.gov.

