



## Bat Safety: Frequently Asked Questions

### Do All Bats Carry Rabies?

No. In Washington State, about 5-10% of the bats that are tested for rabies test positive. Washington State Department of Health (DOH) estimates that only about 1% of all native wild bats carry the rabies virus.

Bats are an extremely important species within the ecosystem, and benefit humans more than they cause harm. Bats help control insect populations and are especially important in the regulation of mosquitoes. Contrary to popular belief, bats are not blind and will not typically get entangled in your hair or try to bite you. There are no species of bat in Washington that feed on blood.

### Signs a Bat Might Have Rabies

The only way to know for certain if a bat has rabies, is through laboratory testing. If a bat is active during the day or is in a place where bats are usually not found, it could potentially be rabid. If a bat is sick or unable to fly, it may also have rabies. Sometimes a bat that has fallen to the ground or is having difficulty flying, may be a juvenile just learning to fly, or may have run into something and is just dazed. If you see a bat laying on the ground, do not try to pick it up. If it is healthy, it should be able to get up and fly away on its own.

### How Do I Prevent Contact with Bats?

You can prevent contact with bats by taking a few, simple precautions. Bats typically avoid contact with humans, but it is possible for them to get into your home and to come in contact with them that way. Some bats prefer man-made structures over natural roosting spaces, and often times they may be forced to roost in your home if their natural habitat has been invaded or destroyed.

Here are the easiest, most effective ways to bat-proof your house and are safe for both you and for the bats. Excluding bats from your home by sealing off common entry points is the most effective method. Common entry points for bats include chimneys, joints between window frames and siding, areas where pipes penetrate ceilings or walls in attics, gaps under shingles, and where walls meet the eaves at the ends of an attic. You can seal these entry points using caulk or insulation. Before sealing off entry points, check to make sure that no bats are already roosting in your home. Sealing them in will kill them and the smell will permeate your home. See the link below on [Living With Wildlife](#) for a comprehensive guide to bat proofing homes and structures. Trapping and relocating bats is NOT recommended as traps can be fatal to bats. You may also want to consider building a bat house on your property, which will provide a safe place for bats to roost instead.

The other option for excluding bats from your home is best done between mid-August and mid-October. You can create an undesirable atmosphere for the bats by installing bright lights, a fan, a loud radio or ultrasonic device. Bats do not like bright lights, loud noises, or windy environments. Do **NOT** use naphthalene or mothballs to get rid of bats. These substances contain chemicals that can be toxic to humans and pets. Poisoned bats are likely to remain in your home where they will die slowly and are more likely to come in contact with children or pets.

Generally, if you do not disturb a bat, it will not disturb you. Exercise caution and be aware when you are outside at night, but you do not need to be afraid of bats.

### **I May Have Come in Contact with A Bat, What Do I Do?**

If you come in contact with a bat or have been bitten by a bat, it is important to see a healthcare provider as soon as possible. You also need to contact Northeast Tri County Health District (NETCHD) or your local health department to determine if the bat needs to be tested for rabies. If you can do so without risking further contact, capture or isolate the bat so that it may be sent to a laboratory to be tested for rabies. If you have been bitten, be sure to wash the wound with soap and water immediately, as rabies is carried in saliva.

If you find a dead or dying bat in or around your home, put it in a sealed container for testing. Do this without touching the bat. Always wear leather or thick gloves as a precaution against contact. Never handle a bat with your bare hands.

### **When to Send a Bat in for Testing**

You should contact the NETCHD or your local health department for help determining whether you will need to bring the bat in for testing and if you or your family should start treatment for rabies.

You may need to bring a bat in for testing if:

- The bat was found in a room with a sleeping person
- The bat was found near an unattended child
- The bat is found in a room with a person who has sensory or mental impairments, due to illness, alcohol use, drug use, or preexisting conditions
- The bat had direct contact with a human

### **The Bat I Found Tested Positive for Rabies, What Do I Do?**

If you have had suspected or confirmed contact with a bat, it is generally advised that you begin post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) treatment. This treatment includes one (1) dose of human rabies immunoglobulin (HRIG) and four (4) doses of rabies vaccine given on a specific schedule over a fourteen (14) day period. If you have a weak immune system you may also need additional vaccines and blood tests.

If your pet had contact with a rabid bat, you will need to take them to a veterinarian to get a rabies booster shot and you will need to keep them under control for a forty-five (45) day observation period. It is important that you always keep your pet up to date on their shots. If your pet is not current on their shots and may have had contact with a rabid bat, then further consultation with NETCHD or your local health department and with your veterinarian will be necessary.

## Contact Information:

Northeast Tri County Health District Offices:

- Colville – Stevens County: 509-684-2262
- Newport – Pend Oreille County: 509-447-3131
- Republic – Ferry County: 509-775-3111

## Links

Northeast Tri County Health District: <http://www.netchd.org/index.php?id=218>

Living With Wildlife: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/bats.html>

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

CDC: Take Caution When Bats Are Near <http://www.cdc.gov/features/bats/>

List of Wildlife Control Operators in Washington: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/nuisance/nwco.php>

Rabies, Suspected Exposure: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/5100/420-073-Guideline-RabiesSuspectedExposure.pdf>