

Handling Calls About Bat Encounters

An encounter with a bat can put a person or pet at **risk of rabies**, and must be taken seriously. An encounter is any known or suspected physical interaction between a bat and a person or pet. Bat bites may go unnoticed, leaving little or no evidence of a wound or puncture. The situation should be evaluated even if the caller is not sure about physical interaction, such as uncertain situations like waking to a bat in the bedroom or seeing a bat laying near a cat.



1

Have caller contact their LHJ immediately.

The **Local Health Jurisdiction (LHJ)** determines if the bat encounter poses a risk of **rabies exposure** to a person or pet. If a person is at risk, the LHJ arranges for the bat to be tested at the state public health laboratory.

- Gather basic information about the bat encounter and caller's contact information (at minimum, name/address/phone number). Give this information to the LHJ to ensure the caller receives follow-up.
- Tell the caller not to release a live, caught bat or throw out a dead bat until the LHJ determines if the bat needs to be tested for rabies.

2

Make sure pet's rabies vaccination is current.

- Check the rabies vaccination status of the potentially exposed pet.
- If the LHJ determines a dog/cat/ferret has potential exposure to rabies:
 - Encourage the caller to make an appointment with a veterinarian immediately for **rabies vaccination**, even if the pet is up-to-date.
 - Consult with LHJ on the appropriate observation and confinement period and how to manage this period for an exposed dog/cat/ferret, pending rabies testing results in the bat (see #3).

3

Encourage testing of the bat for pet-only exposure (no person exposed).

Bats that have had contact with a pet only—as determined by the LHJ—should be tested for rabies if possible.

- Pet owners can pay for testing to be done at **Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Lab**, 509-335-9696 or **Oregon State University Veterinary Diagnostic Lab**, 541-737-3261.
- The LHJ can consult on how to safely transport and how/where to have a bat humanely euthanized prior to rabies testing.

Having the bat tested for rabies is important for management of the pet. If the bat tests negative, the pet is not at risk of rabies infection. If the bat tests positive or is unable to be tested, the pet needs to be observed for symptoms and confined for a period of time as defined by the LHJ.

DOH Resources

- **State Public Health Veterinarian:** Dr. Beth Lipton 564-669-0656 and beth.lipton@doh.wa.gov or zd@doh.wa.gov
- **Local Health Jurisdiction Contact Information:** doh.wa.gov/aboutus/publichealthsystem/localhealthjurisdictions
- **Rabies:** doh.wa.gov/youandyourfamily/illnessanddisease/rabies
- **How to Safely Capture a Bat for Rabies Testing:** doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Pubs/420-190-BatTransportInstructions.pdf
- **Rabies Vaccination Requirements for Pets:** doh.wa.gov/youandyourfamily/illnessanddisease/rabies/petvaccinationrequirement

More Resources

- **Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory, Rabies Submissions:** <https://waddl.vetmed.wsu.edu/search-tests/Panels/Test-Details?id=2063>
- **Oregon State University, Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, Rabies Submissions:** vetmed.oregonstate.edu/diagnostic/rabies-submissions
- **Public Health-Seattle & King County, How to safely capture a bat in your home (video):** youtu.be/Fd8PMAc6T2c
- **WDFW Wildlife Rehabilitation Centers in Washington:** wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/living/injured-wildlife/rehabilitation/find
- **WDFW Bat White-nose Syndrome Reporting:** wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/diseases/bat-white-nose
- **WDFW Living with Wildlife-Bats:** wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/living/species-facts/bats
- **AVMA Rabies and Your Pet:** avma.org/public/Health/Pages/rabies.aspx
- **NASPHV Rabies Compendium:** nasphv.org/documentsCompendiaRabies.html