



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BYPASS BATS TO REDUCE RABIES RISK

BELLINGHAM, WA — Summer brings more potential for encounters with bats, including some that carry the rabies virus. A bat recently submitted from Whatcom County to the state public health lab due to human exposure has tested positive for rabies, the second positive test for the county in 2018, and the Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) is reminding people to take precautions to protect against rabies.

Bats are the primary carrier of rabies, and between 3-10% of bats submitted for testing in Washington State are found to have rabies. Anyone who has been bitten or scratched by a bat should take prompt action to protect themselves from disease by cleaning the site of the bite with soap and water, capturing the bat safely, and calling their health care provider and the Whatcom County Health Department at (360)778-6100.

Rabies infection can occur when people are bitten by a rabid animal or have contact with the animal's saliva. The rabies virus attacks the nervous system, and once symptoms appear, the disease is nearly always fatal. However, rabies in humans is 100% preventable with prompt medical care, including a series of shots that contain the rabies vaccine.

Bats that have come into contact with humans or pets need to be captured and tested to rule out a risk of rabies. WCHD will help determine if anyone may have been bitten or scratched by the bat and if it should be tested for rabies. Never handle a bat without protective equipment. For instructions on how to safely capture a bat, visit <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/5100/420-190-BatTransportInstructions.pdf>.

Bats have very small teeth, and it is possible to have been bitten by a bat and not know it. If a bat was found in a room with an unattended child, someone who was sleeping or intoxicated, or someone who is mentally or physically challenged, you should also seek immediate medical attention and call WCHD.

If you find a bat in the house and are sure no one was touched by the bat, allow the bat to leave by closing doors to the room it is in and opening windows. Contact the Whatcom Humane Society's Animal Control services at (360)733-2080 if assistance is needed to capture the bat. If you find a bat outside the house, leave it alone.

Bats are very important to our environment, but they are wild animals and should be left alone. To avoid bats:

- Never handle, feed or play with bats.
- Teach children to avoid bats and to tell an adult if they have contact with a bat.
- Keep pets away from bats and make sure your pet has a current rabies vaccination.
- Prevent bats from entering your home by making sure that windows and doors are properly screened.

For more information, visit <https://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/Rabies>.

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