

Dear Colleagues,

We are happy to share this Summer edition of the Public Health Vet Update after a long pause! This issue contains current information regarding SARS-CoV-2 infections in animals, harmful algal blooms, recent *Salmonella* outbreaks related to non-traditional pets, and how to manage rabies exposures.

If you are a King County veterinary professional, please call or email us anytime with questions regarding suspected or confirmed cases of zoonotic diseases or other diseases of concern, such as canine influenza. Share this link with all your colleagues as only subscribers receive the newsletter: www.kingcounty.gov/zoo. All previously published newsletters are also available at this website.

Sincerely,

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KEEP PETS SAFE FROM HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS (HABS)

Harmful algal blooms (HABs) are the rapid growth of blue-green algae or cyanobacteria, which are microscopic organisms that can be found naturally in all types of water. These blooms can cause harm to people and animals, including pets and livestock, when they produce various toxins. Harmful algae can look like foam, scum, paint, or mats on the surface of water and can be many different colors. Sometimes the water remains clear, and some blooms make toxins which can still be in the water even when you can't see a bloom. Also, a visible "bloom" does not always indicate that harmful algal toxins are present. It is not possible to know if an algal bloom is harmful just by looking at it; the only way to know for sure is to test the water.

Animal owners should be aware of HABs and know to keep pets and livestock away from water if they see signs of an algal bloom, like scum or changes in the water's color. If pets have been in the water with an algal bloom, owners should immediately wash them off with clean water to keep them from licking cyanobacteria off their fur and call a veterinarian right away if they develop any signs of illness. An animal's symptoms may indicate exposure to hepatotoxins, neurotoxins, or dermatotoxins. Common signs of illness include excessive drooling, vomiting, diarrhea, loss of energy, loss of appetite, jaundice, acute body rash, coughing, dyspnea, ataxia, foaming at the mouth, convulsions, and tremors and seizures. If an animal presents with any of these signs, ask about water exposure. Consider posting this [Animal Safety Alert](#) sign to help educate clients about HABs.

Any suspected case of HAB poisoning should be reported to Public Health. Public Health will investigate the case, try to coordinate getting a water sample for testing as soon as possible (if the owner hasn't collected one already), work with the Dept. of Health and Dept. of Ecology on monitoring and notification, and report the case to [CDC's One Health Harmful Algal Bloom System](#) if indicated. In Washington many bodies of water are routinely tested, especially in late summer and early fall, and these results can be found at the [Washington State Toxic Algae website](#). This website also includes instructions on collecting and submitting samples from bodies of water where a bloom is noted or where suspected HAB-associated human or animal illness has occurred.



Foam, scum, mats, or paint-like streaks on the water's surface



Different colors like green, blue, red, or brown

Photo source: CDC

For more information on animal HAB diagnosis and treatment, see the WA Dept. of Health's [Veterinarian Reference Card for Toxic Blue-Green Algae](#) and visit the [AVMA's HAB website](#).

To learn more about how to keep lakes healthy, visit the [Department of Ecology's Freshwater Algae Control Program website](#).

MANAGING ANIMAL BITES & RABIES EXPOSURES

The summer months are always busiest for animal bites and exposures to bats. Veterinarians are often contacted first and expected to respond to these exposures. Dogs and cats that bite a person and dogs/cats that have an exposure to a potentially rabid animal - mainly bats in Washington - each need to undergo an observation and confinement period; however, these two situations require very different confinement periods (*see flowchart below*). A dog or cat that bites a person needs to undergo a 10 day observation and confinement period, while a dog or cat that has been exposed to a suspected rabid animal will have an observation and confinement period that lasts either 45 days or 120 days (4 months).

Bats are the only known reservoir for rabies in Washington; however, the risk for transmission to other animals, such as other wildlife, always exists. For humans, all bites and scratches from a bat are considered high risk, and Public Health provides rabies testing of these bats free of charge. When a pet only has been exposed to a bat, it is the responsibility of the pet owner to pay for [rabies testing](#) (\$99 + shipping to Oregon State University's Veterinary Laboratory).

Any bat that is not tested for rabies should be considered a potentially rabid animal. If a client has a dog or cat that has encountered a bat, instruct the client to collect the bat without touching it (watch a video on how to do so [here](#)), keep a live bat in a container with small air holes or a deceased bat double-bagged in the refrigerator, and call Public Health for consultation.



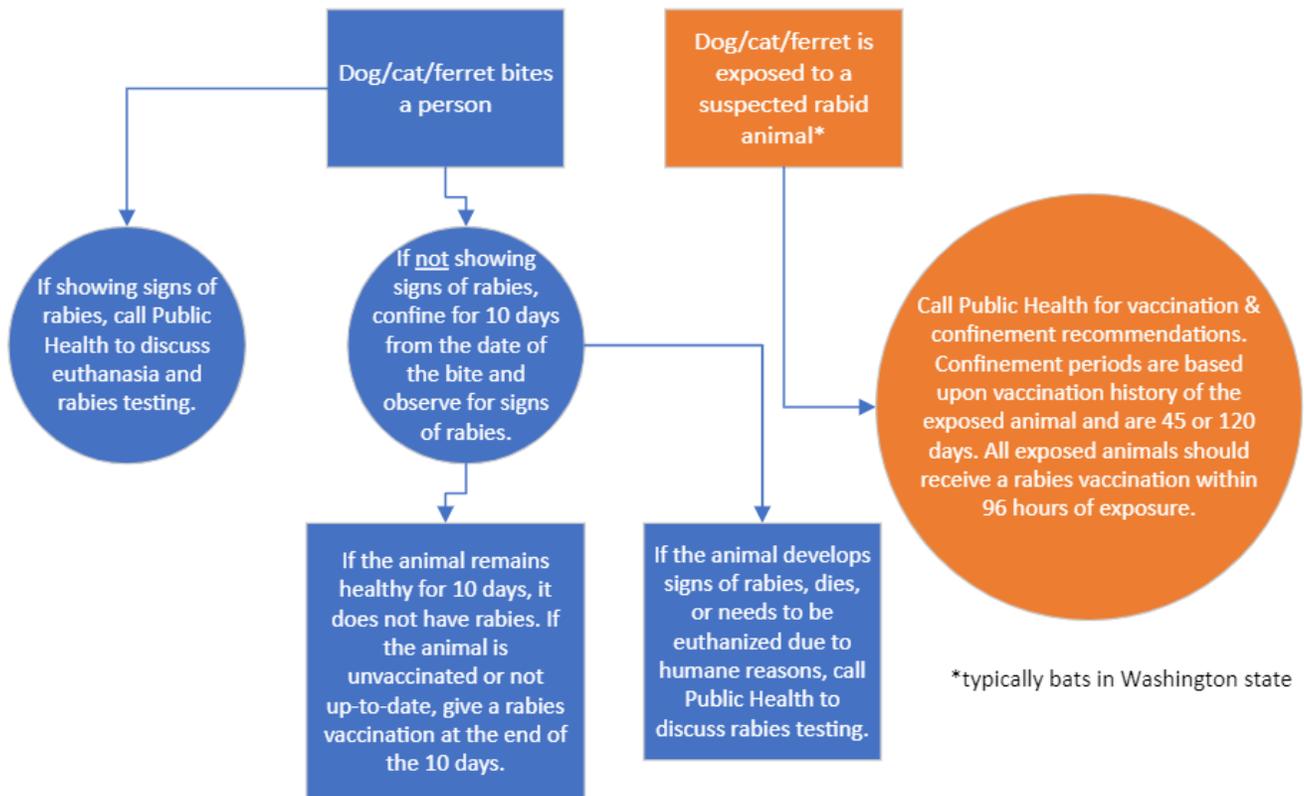
Resources:

[Animal bites and rabies, PHSKC](#)

[Bats and rabies, PHSKC](#)

[Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control, 2016:](#) provides recommendations that serve as a basis for animal rabies prevention and control programs throughout the United States and facilitate standardization of procedures among jurisdictions

[Rabies information for veterinarians, CDC](#)



In King County:

Report suspected rabies exposures in humans immediately to Public Health, Communicable Disease at 206.296.4774. Consultation is also available at this number 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Report animal exposure only (no human exposure) within one day to the Public Health Veterinarian at 206.263.8454.

VETERINARIANS' ROLE IN PREVENTING *SALMONELLA* INFECTION FROM NON-TRADITIONAL PETS*

Since January 2020, the CDC has reported several *Salmonella* bacteria outbreaks linked to non-traditional pets* in several states, including Washington. Over 3,300 people in the U.S. have become ill after coming into contact with *Salmonella* bacteria from backyard poultry, pet bearded dragons, pet hedgehogs, and pet turtles. The CDC estimates that for every reported human case of *Salmonella* infection, there are approximately 29 more cases that go unreported. Most people with *Salmonella* infection have diarrhea, fever, and stomach cramps, but some people are at higher risk for severe disease that requires medical treatment or hospitalization, including infants, adults aged 65 and older, and people with weakened immune systems. As non-traditional pets often carry *Salmonella* bacteria without appearing sick and shed them in their droppings, people can get infected by touching infected animals, their droppings, or their environment.

Help limit the spread of *Salmonella* and other zoonotic diseases by doing the following when appropriate:

- Discuss with clients how to choose an appropriate pet and advise them on which pets are best for their household. Be familiar with recommendations regarding pet ownership; for example, some pets aren't recommended for people at higher risk of illness including children younger than 5 years old, adults 65 and older, people with weakened immune systems, and pregnant people.
- Discuss with current/prospective pet owners proper animal husbandry and ways to prevent zoonotic disease spread.
- Alert clients and staff to the risk of *Salmonella* and other zoonotic pathogens that non-traditional pets carry.
- Be familiar with and share trusted resources with clients such as CDC's [Healthy Pets, Healthy People](#) website.
- Stress the importance of thorough hand washing with soap and water right after touching or feeding these animals and after touching or cleaning the area where they live.
- Direct staff with occupational risks to relevant resources related to zoonotic disease prevention.
- Provide recommendations on appropriate disease treatment, including principles of [antimicrobial stewardship](#), in the case of ill or suspected infected animals.

A newly published resource from the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, and endorsed by the CDC, addresses *Salmonella* and other zoonotic diseases from non-traditional pets: [A Compendium of Measures to Prevent Zoonotic Diseases Associated with Non-Traditional Pets Such as Rodents and Other Small Mammals, Reptiles, Amphibians, Backyard Poultry, and Other Selected Animals](#)

*Non-traditional pets have a widely accepted definition of pets other than dogs and cats, including rodents and other small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, aquatic species, and backyard poultry, even though they are food-producing animals.

These persons have weaker immune systems and are at higher risk for zoonotic disease or more serious illness if infected:

- organ transplant recipients
- people on cancer treatment or other medicines that suppress the immune system
- people with AIDS
- children under 5 years old
- adults age 65 and older
- pregnant women



People at higher risk for zoonotic disease should avoid:

- Reptiles & amphibians (lizards, snakes, frogs, turtles)
- Baby poultry (chicks & ducklings)
- Non-traditional pets like hedgehogs
- Sick animals, especially those with diarrhea
- **Pregnant women** should avoid contact with rodents due to the risk of LCMV (lymphocytic choriomeningitis virus) infection that can harm the unborn baby.



Selected Notifiable Conditions (# of cases reported)	King County		WA State	
	Yearly average, 2018-20	2021	Yearly average, 2018-20	2021
Human Cases:				
Brucellosis	0.7	0	2	1
Coccidiomycosis (Valley Fever)*	13	34	63	101
Cryptococcus gattii	0	0	3	1
Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome	0	1	1	1
Leptospirosis	1	0	3	2
Lyme disease	10	28	28	59
Plague	0	0	0	0
Psittacosis	0	1	0	1
Q Fever	0.7	1	2.3	2
Rabies suspected exposures	163	132	324	252
Tularemia	1	2	4.3	4
West Nile virus	0.3	0	3.3	4
Animal Surveillance:				
Positive rabies in bats tested	5	6	19	12
Positive rabies in other mammals	0	0	0	0
Cryptococcus gattii	0	0	0	0
West Nile virus: mammals	0.3	0	3.3	11
West Nile virus: birds	0	0	1.3	0
West Nile virus: mosquitoes	0	0	30	51

Note: 2021 counts are preliminary & may change as case information is reviewed and/or more cases are reported; *3 cases in 2018 exposed in-state (none to King County residents) and unknown exposure location for 14 cases in 2018, 7 cases in 2019, 8 cases in 2020

UPDATE ON COVID-19 AND ANIMALS

C COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019) is a disease in people caused by a virus named SARS-CoV-2 (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus) which was discovered in December 2019 in China. SARS-CoV-2 spreads mainly from person to person through respiratory droplets and particles.

Animals, including pets, can be infected with SARS-CoV-2. Most of these animals became infected after known contact with people with COVID-19, including owners, caretakers, or others who were in close contact. Currently, there is no evidence that pets or animals play a significant role in spreading SARS-CoV-2. There have been rare reports of infected animals such as mink, hamsters, and deer spreading the virus to people when in close contact. Further studies are needed to understand how different animals are affected by the virus, and the role they may play in the spread of COVID-19.

Some of the animals reported to be infected include:

- Companion animals, including cats, dogs, hamsters, and ferrets.
- Animals in zoos and sanctuaries, including several types of big cats, otters, non-human primates, a binturong, a coatimundi, a fishing cat, and hyenas.
- Mink on mink farms.
- Wild white-tailed deer in several U.S. states.



Guidance for Pet Owners with COVID-19

A pet owner who is infected with COVID-19 should restrict contact with pets and other animals, just as they would with other people. They should avoid contact including petting, snuggling, being kissed or licked, sharing food, and sleeping in the same bed. If an owner must care for a pet while sick, they should wear a face mask and wash their hands before and after interacting with the pet.

There is no evidence that the virus can spread to people from the skin or fur of pets. People should not wipe or bathe a pet with disinfectants, alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, or other products, such as hand sanitizer, cleaning wipes, or other cleaners. CDC has a fact sheet for pet owners, [What You Need to Know About COVID-19 and Pets](#).

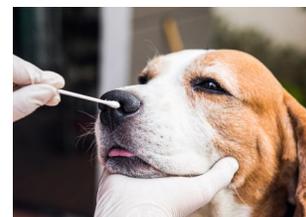
General considerations for veterinary facilities

COVID-19 remains a serious workplace hazard, and businesses must continue to reduce risk of transmission for their workers by following requirements in accordance with the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries. Face masks are not currently required in veterinary health care settings.

Pet owners who have COVID-19-like symptoms, or are suspected or known to be infected with COVID-19, should not visit a veterinary facility and instead ask a family member or friend from outside the household to bring the animal. If this pet owner must bring their pet to the clinic, actions should be taken that maintain physical distance and prevent the owner from having to enter the facility.

Pets infected with SARS-CoV-2 and testing for SARS-CoV-2

Infected pets might get sick or they might not have any symptoms. Most pets that have gotten sick only had mild illness and fully recovered. Some signs of illness in pets may include fever, coughing, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, lethargy, sneezing, nasal/ocular discharge, vomiting, and diarrhea.



Testing of pets for SARS-CoV-2 could be considered with compatible illness and known COVID-19 exposure.

Veterinarians should use their clinical judgement, including considering other common causes of illness, when deciding whether to test animals for SARS-CoV-2.

Veterinarians should report any positive case to the WA Dept. of Agriculture. Coordination with public health is important if a companion animal is diagnosed with SARS-CoV-2. Because the risk of companion animals spreading SARS-CoV-2 to people is low, necessary veterinary care for animals that test positive for SARS-CoV-2 should not be withheld.

Resources

[WA L&I Requirements and Guidance for Preventing COVID-19 Information about COVID-19, Pets, and Other Animals, CDC One Health Toolkit for Health Officials Managing Companion Animals with SARS-CoV-2, CDC](#)

Need Continuing Education Credits?

The Center for Food Security and Public Health (CFSPH) at Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine offers an online course, *Zoonoses: Protecting People and Their Pets*, all the time!

The course is self-study, with 90 days to access and complete the course after registration.

The course addresses zoonotic diseases of companion animals – dogs, cats, pocket pets, pet birds, reptiles and amphibians, and fish – with a focus on prevention measures to protect human and animal health and offers 10 hours RACE CE. The cost is \$250 and a textbook is included.

To register, visit <https://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/product/zoonoses-course/>

Are you familiar with Public Health's online resources for veterinarians?

Visit the [Resources for King County veterinarians website](#) for veterinary public health resources such as current and past issues of the King County Vet Update newsletters, a veterinarian reference manual, rabies resources, and case report forms for canine brucellosis, influenza, leptospirosis and SARS-CoV-2 testing.