

# CDC Vitalsigns™

## Rabies: A Forgotten Killer Greatest Risk from Wildlife, Especially Bats



Want to learn more?  
[www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/rabies](http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/rabies)

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Every 10 minutes, someone in the US is treated for possible exposure to rabies.

5,000

About 5,000 animals—mostly wildlife—test positive for rabies each year in the US.

70%

7 out of 10 Americans who die from rabies in the US were infected by bats.

### Overview:

Rabies is a virus that infects wildlife, especially bats, raccoons, skunks and foxes in the US. It can spread to people and pets when they are bitten or scratched, causing fever, agitation and death. Rabies is 100% preventable with post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) that includes rabies vaccine and medications to fight infection, as long as people get PEP before symptoms start. Understanding the risk and knowing what to do after contact with wildlife can save lives.

- The best way to avoid rabies is to stay away from wildlife.
- Contact with infected bats is the leading cause of rabies deaths in people in the US.
- Rabid dogs outside the US are the second-leading cause of rabies deaths in Americans, who are exposed during travel abroad.
- Whether in the US or abroad, seeing a healthcare provider quickly after an animal bite or scratch can ensure people get PEP if needed.



### PROBLEM:

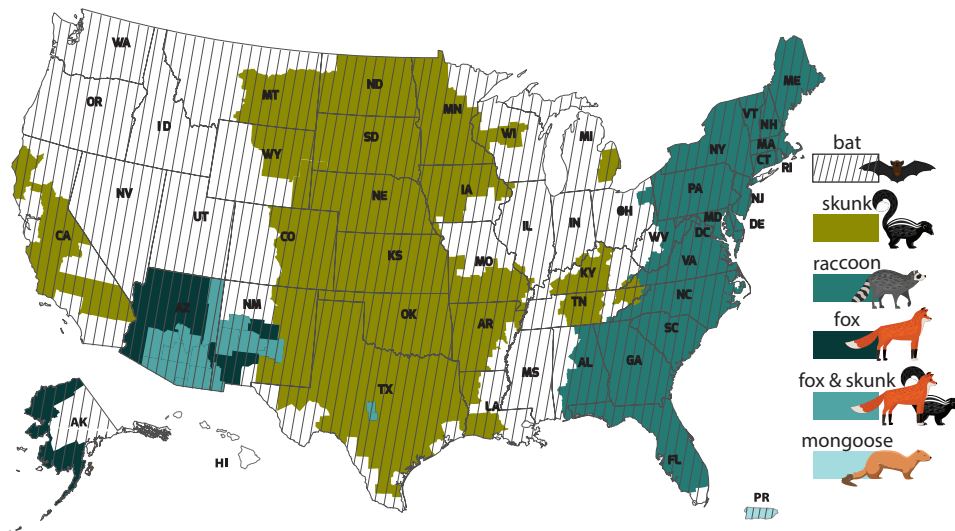
## People may not know about rabies.

- Once the leading cause of human rabies deaths in the US, dogs are no longer as much of a risk thanks to the use of rabies vaccines. Dogs are only 1% of rabid animals reported each year.
- People might worry about rabies in animals that don't often carry the virus, like opossums or squirrels. But these animals hardly ever have rabies.
- People may not recognize a scratch or bite from a bat, which can be smaller than the top of a pencil eraser. But these types of contact can still spread rabies!
- It's not only in the woods – rabid animals can be found in people's yards and homes too!

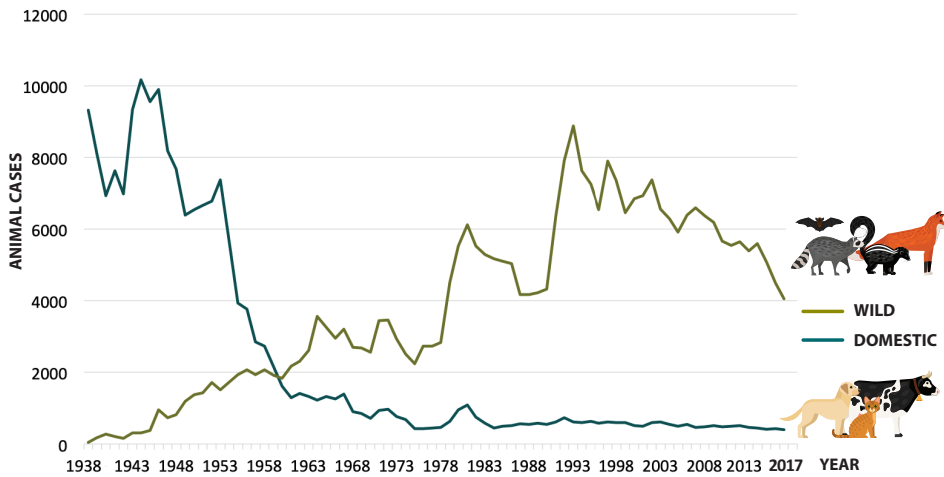


Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention  
National Center for Emerging and  
Zoonotic Infectious Diseases

# Common carriers of rabies by location in the US.



## Then & Now: Changes in Rabid Animals Reported



SOURCE: US National Rabies Surveillance System

## Rabies prevention by the numbers



- About 55,000 Americans get post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) each year to prevent rabies infection after being bitten or scratched by an infected or suspected infected animal.
- Each year, CDC and its public health partners respond to 175 mass bat exposures (events where more than 10 people are exposed to a potentially rabid bat).

# THE WAY FORWARD

## EVERYONE CAN:

- Leave all wildlife alone.
- Wash animal bites or scratches immediately with soap and water.
- If you are bitten, scratched or unsure, talk to a healthcare provider about whether you need PEP.
- Vaccinate your pets to protect them and your family.
- If you find injured wildlife, don't touch it; contact local authorities for assistance.

## HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS CAN:

- Contact local/state health departments for help with risk assessments and PEP recommendations.
- Ask patients if they had recent animal bites or scratches.

## INTERNATIONAL TRAVELERS CAN:

- Get health recommendations for your destination: [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel).
- Know if rabies is present in dogs or wildlife where you are going.
- While abroad, avoid contact with all animals.
- Seek medical care ASAP if you are bitten or scratched.

## For more information

1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)

TTY: 1-888-232-6348 | Web: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

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Publication date: June 12, 2019