

RABIES IN IDAHO

GENERAL INFORMATION

All mammals can become infected with the rabies virus and all mammals should be considered potentially rabid when they bite, scratch or otherwise expose people or pets to their saliva. Other exposures that could also be considered high risk for rabies infection include contacting nervous tissue (brain or spinal cord) from a potentially rabid animal or waking in a room with a bat, without having a clear idea of the bat's behavior during the night.

Rabies infections are virtually 100% fatal in people and animals, without timely medical intervention. If a person has been exposed to a rabid animal they should discuss the situation with a healthcare provider as soon as possible to determine if the rabies immune globulin and vaccination series is warranted (this is known as rabies post-exposure prophylaxis [rPEP]).

If a pet or other domestic animal is exposed to a potentially rabid animal (e.g., attacked by a wild animal, captured a bat, bitten by another domestic animal) the owner should discuss the animal's exposure with their veterinarian (ideally within 48 hours of exposure) and decide what medical management or confinement options would be appropriate. Pet owners should always keep rabies vaccinations up-to-date for their dogs and cats. Even animals with current vaccinations that are exposed to a potentially rabid animal should be referred to a veterinarian to make sure that they are being properly protected from this deadly virus; any animal exposed to a rabid animal will get a rabies booster regardless of their current vaccination status.

Table 1. Rabid Bats—Idaho, 1999–2018	
Year	Rabid bats
2018	12
2017	15
2016	20
2015	10
2014	12
2013	27
2012	24
2011	8
2010	11
2009	8
2008	11
2007	12
2006	26
2005	12
2004	7
2003	15
2002	38
2001	28
2000	10
1999	5
Table 2. Other rabid animal species detected in Idaho, by year of detection	
2014	1 skunk
2004	1 skunk
2001	1 bobcat
1999	1 horse
1992	1 cat
1991	1 cat
1968	1 raccoon, imported from FL
1967	1 cat, 1 skunk

SURVEILLANCE FINDINGS

In Idaho, only bats are known to be natural reservoirs for rabies. However, bats are not the only animal to worry about when it comes to rabies; all mammals can potentially contract and spread the disease. Between 1999 and 2018 an average of 16 bats (range of 5 – 38) (Table 1) tested positive for rabies each year by the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare Bureau of Laboratories (IBL). An average of 10.6% of bat submissions (range: 4.8% to 19.8%), were rabies-positive. This percentage refers only to bats submitted for testing; the actual frequency of rabies in the overall bat population in Idaho is not known, but likely much lower. Rabid bats have been reported from almost all parts of Idaho and have been detected from March to November.

A handful of other species in Idaho have also been documented with the bat strain of rabies virus (Table 2). Because other mammals have tested positive for rabies, the risk of rabies exposure from bites, scratches, or other exposures to saliva or brain tissue from mammals other than bats must not be ignored as a possible risk for rabies.

The natural geographic distribution of rabies in Idaho is unknown. Rabid animals have been detected from across the state and annually, sick migratory bats could be responsible for introducing the virus into new areas. Because of this, no area of Idaho is deemed rabies-free.

The 2008-2018 annual data, and 2019 current rabies data, including maps, may be accessed from the rabies home page: <http://rabies.dhw.idaho.gov>

To learn more about rabies in people and pets, visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/>