

ANIMAL 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, chewed on 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; including indoor animals as bats are often found inside homes. 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 vaccination status.

Table 1. Rabid Bats—Idaho, 1999–2019	
Year	Rabid bats
2019	14
2018	12
2017	15
2016	20
2015	10
2014	11
2013	27
2012	23
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 and county of detection	
2019	1 cat (Owyhee County)
2014	1 skunk (Adams/Valley county border)
2004	1 skunk (Gooding County)
2001	1 bobcat (Bannock County)
1999	1 horse (Bonneville/Jefferson county border)
1992	1 cat (PHD 7)
1991	1 cat (PHD 7)
1968	1 raccoon, imported from FL (PHD 2)
1967	1 cat (PHD 1), 1 skunk (PHD 3)

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SURVEILLANCE FINDINGS

In Idaho, only bats are known to be natural reservoirs for the rabies virus. However, bats are not the only animal to worry about when it comes to rabies; all mammals can potentially contract and spread the virus. Between 1999 and 2019 an average of 15 bats (range of 5 – 38) (Table 1) tested positive for rabies each year at the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, Division of Public Health, 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. 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.

The geographic distribution of rabies in wild animals in Idaho remains unknown. However, the geographic distribution of rabid animals detected through testing by IBL after animal and/or human encounters shows that rabid animals have been detected in most counties. A 12-year representation of rabid animals detected by IBL is shown here (map). Although some areas have not submitted animals testing positive for rabies during this time frame, no area of Idaho should be considered rabies-free.

The 2008-2019 annual data, and 2020 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/>

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