

Rabies, Animal

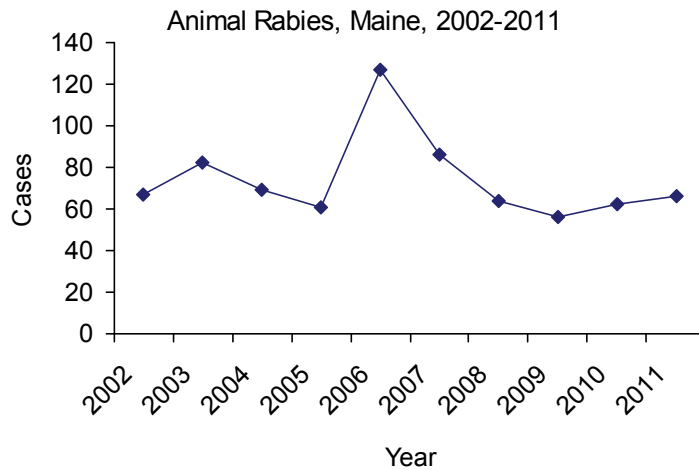
2011 Case Total **66**
Maine Rate **N/A**
U.S. Count (2010) **6,155**

Rabies is a zoonotic disease caused by a virus that affects the nervous system (brain and spinal cord). Rabies in humans is rare in the United States. The vast majority of rabies infections are found in wild animals, including raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes. Humans usually get rabies from the bite of a rabid animal. It is also possible, but quite rare, for people to get rabies if infectious material from a rabid animal, such as saliva or neural tissue, gets directly into their eyes, nose, mouth or a wound. Because rabies has occurred in people who have very close contact with bats without an apparent bite, this type of contact is also considered a risk and should be evaluated by a healthcare provider.

When a human is infected with rabies the virus infects the central nervous system. The earliest symptoms include fever and general discomfort. As the disease progresses symptoms may include difficulty sleeping, anxiety, confusion, hallucinations, excessive drooling, difficulty swallowing, and fear of water. Death generally follows a few days after the onset of symptoms.

- Case total of 66 animal rabies cases represents an increase from 62 cases in 2010
- The 2006-2010 median number of cases per year was 64 cases
- The last reported case of human rabies in Maine was in 1937
- 34 persons recommended to receive PEP after exposure to a rabid animal
- 110 persons reported for receiving PEP after exposure to a suspect rabid animal that was not available for testing

Testing an animal for rabies requires central nervous system or brain tissue, which must be obtained from the animal after it is deceased. Using direct fluorescent anti-



Positive Rabies Results by Species, Maine, 2011

Animal	Number Positive
Raccoon	32
Skunk	12
Fox	11
Bat	5
Cat (feral)	2
Sheep	2
Horse	1
Bobcat	1

body testing, the state's public health laboratory can determine whether wild or domestic animals that exposed a human or domestic animal are infected with the virus. In 2011, an unvaccinated domestic horse tested positive for rabies after exposure to a raccoon.

If it is determined that a human was exposed to an infected animal, a course of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is recommended. Generally, rabies PEP consists of a course of immune globulin and vaccine over a 14 day period.

Human rabies cases in the United States are rare. Increased public awareness of rabies may reduce the number of exposures. Though rabies is generally found in wild animals, it is important to keep domestic animals up to date on rabies vaccination. The use of human rabies PEP after an exposure is effective in preventing disease.