

## The State of Rabies in the United States—Is Yours at Higher Risk?

**Rabies, an acute, progressive encephalomyelitis caused by RNA viruses in the family *Rhabdoviridae*, genus *Lyssavirus*, has the highest case fatality rate of any conventional infectious disease.<sup>1,2</sup> Once symptoms appear, rabies is virtually 100% fatal.<sup>3</sup> Patients infected with rabies are thus almost twice as likely to die as those who contract the notorious Zaire Ebolavirus, which has a case fatality rate of around 50%.<sup>4</sup>**

Several areas around the world are considered “free” of rabies, including many islands in the Pacific Ocean,<sup>3</sup> but not the United States. In fact, rabies is found in every US state except Hawaii,<sup>5</sup> and as many as 10,000 animal rabies cases are reported in the US every year.<sup>6</sup> Most US counties submitted between 2 and 25 specimens for rabies testing in 2013.<sup>5</sup>

### Rabies on the Rise?

According to research published recently in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, rabies prevalence in 2013 decreased in many US species—cats, horses and mules, raccoons, skunks, and foxes—compared with the average rate between 2008 and 2012.<sup>5</sup> **But in a number of US states, rabies prevalence has jumped by more than 10% since 2012.<sup>5</sup> In addition, some states reported more than 150 cases of rabid animals during 2013, making these the states with the highest exposure risk.<sup>5</sup>**

### States With Highest Exposure Risk (2013) <sup>5,a</sup>

State	Reservoir	Total (N)	Domestic (N)	Wildlife (N)	Human (N)
Arkansas	Skunk	151	8	143	0
California	Skunk	198	2	196	0
Colorado	Skunk	187	9	178	0
Georgia	Raccoon	297	22	275	0
Maryland	Raccoon	382	29	352	1
New Jersey	Raccoon	315	18	297	0
New York	Raccoon	335	15	320	0
North Carolina	Raccoon	385	31	353	1
Pennsylvania	Raccoon	361	45	316	0
Texas	Skunk	937	60	876	1
Virginia	Raccoon	506	49	457	0

<sup>a</sup> Includes states with >150 rabies cases reported in 2013.

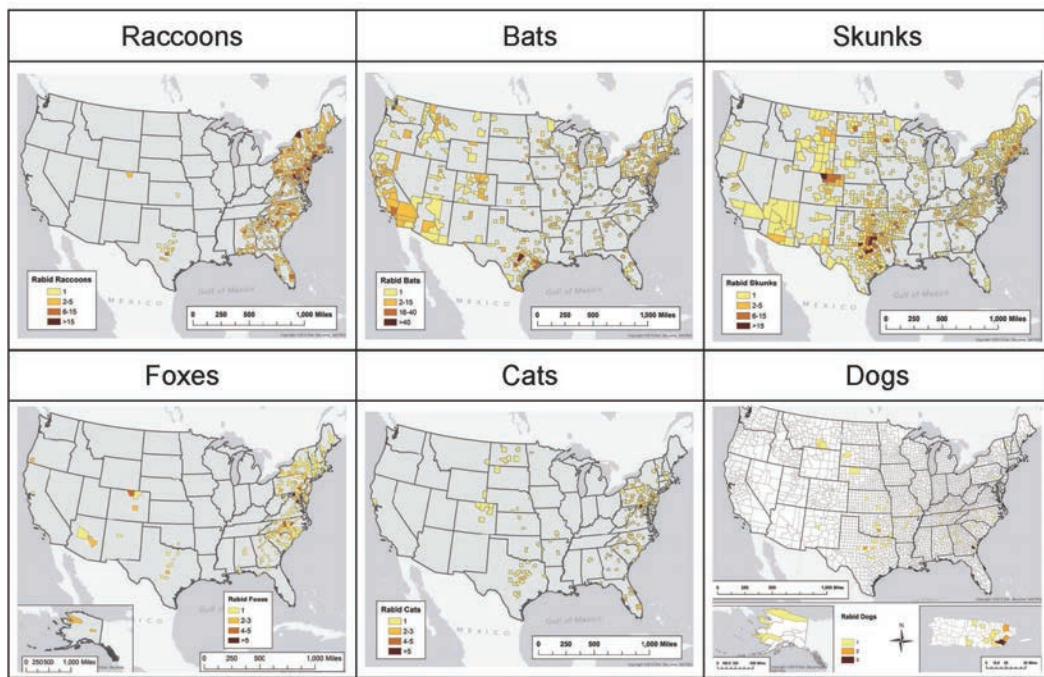
# RABIES WATCH

Notably, most (92%) of the rabid animals reported during 2013 were wildlife rather than domestic animals.<sup>5</sup>

## Most Frequently Reported Rabid Wildlife in 2013<sup>5</sup>

Wildlife	Total cases (N)	Total cases (%)
Raccoons	1898	32.34
Bats	1598	27.23
Skunks	1447	24.66
Foxes	344	5.86

## Reported Cases of Animal Rabies, 2013<sup>5</sup>





# RABIES WATCH

## Recent Reports of Rabies in the News

In December 2014 alone, rabies was featured in a variety of news reports from around the country. Most notably, an animal shelter in Virginia mistakenly released a rabid dog and her puppies to a foster family.<sup>7</sup> The dogs were asymptomatic upon release, but later testing showed that the mother was positive for the rabies virus. Seven people were treated with postexposure prophylaxis, including the foster family and shelter staff.

With such a wide geographic distribution of rabies in the US and rising prevalence in some states, it's important for medical professionals, emergency departments, health departments, veterinarians, and animal control specialists to be aware that rabies-infected animals—and potentially exposed patients—can become an issue in any state in the country.

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For more information, go to [www.rabieswatch.com](http://www.rabieswatch.com)

## References

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**GRIFOLS**