

Rabies, Animal

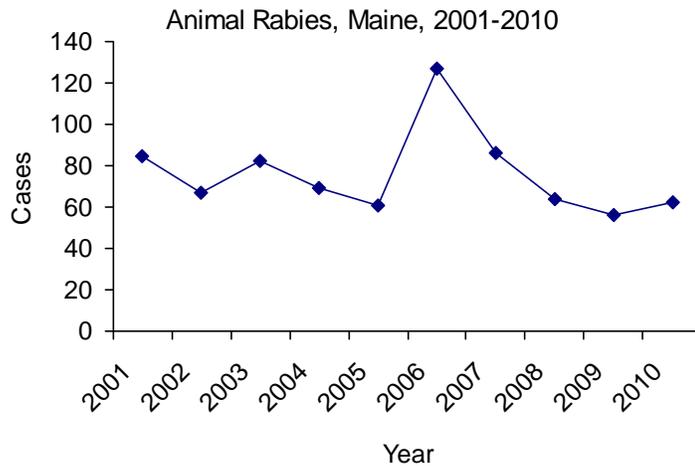
2010 Case Total **62**
Maine Rate **N/A**
U.S. Count (2009) **6,694**

Rabies is a viral disease that affects the nervous system (brain and spinal cord) of humans. 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, gets directly into their eyes, nose, mouth or a wound. Because rabies has also 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.

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 62 represents an increase from 56 cases in 2009
- The 2005-2009 median number of cases per year was 64 cases
- The last reported case of human rabies in Maine was in 1937

Since rabies infects the central nervous system and is not found in the blood of infected animals, testing for rabies requires central nervous system or brain tissue, which must be obtained from the animal after it is deceased. Using direct fluorescent antibody testing, the state's public health laboratory can determine whether or not wild or domestic animals that exposed a human or other domestic animal have been infected with the virus.



Positive Rabies Results by Species, Maine, 2010

Animal	Number Positive
Raccoon	28
Skunk	20
Fox	7
Bat	5
Woodchuck	1
Cat (feral)	1

If it is determined that a human has been exposed to an infected animal, a course of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is recommended. PEP consists of a course of immune globulin and vaccine over a 14 day period. In 2009, guidelines were revised to reduce PEP to a four dose course over 14 days.

Human deaths due to rabies in the United States are rare. The use of rabies PEP and 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.