

Veterinary advisory: rabies (September 10, 2024)

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Current situation

As of September 10, at least 49 rabid bats have been detected in Ontario in 2024. This is consistent with detections in recent years. Since 2016, there have been at least 20 cases of rabies annually detected in bats. Bats are a known high-risk species for rabies transmission, and there are no control measures available for managing rabies in bats. **Rabies is endemic in all bat populations in North America at a low level.**

Bats should not be culled or killed solely for the sake of rabies testing as this provides no useful epidemiological information and bats are very important species in the natural ecosystem. Several species of bats in Ontario are also endangered.

Since December 2015, 523 cases of raccoon variant rabies have been confirmed in southwestern Ontario in raccoons and skunks, as well as in 2 stray cats, 1 red fox, 1 llama and 1 dog. All cases detected in 2022 and 2023 were in the St. Catharines area.

From December 2015 to the end of 2018, 21 cases of fox variant rabies were confirmed in Perth, Huron, Waterloo and Wellington counties, including 7 bovines, 13 skunks and 1 red fox. No fox variant rabies cases have been detected in Ontario since 2018. [Find details and maps of confirmed cases of rabies in Ontario.](#)

Who to contact in cases of potential rabies exposure

Veterinarians should always be the first point of contact for animal owners with concerns about their animals' health, including potential rabies exposures. **Animal owners who contact the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFRA) directly concerning potential rabies exposures will be advised to contact their local veterinarian.**

Veterinarians should contact OMAFA for assistance with risk assessments, sample submission or post-exposure management, as needed. Veterinarians can submit a request for assistance online using the [Rabies response request form](#). Requests submitted within business hours will receive a response the same day, typically within 1-2 hours. Requests can also be submitted outside of business hours and will receive a response the next business day. Interim triage guidance is provided on the webpage. If you require assistance with completing the online form due to limited internet access or due to any other accessibility issue, please contact the Agricultural Information Contact Centre at 1-877-424-1300 (option 1) during business hours (weekdays 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM).

The Ontario [Rabies information for veterinarians](#) website includes detailed information about rabies response in Ontario, including a [risk assessment decision tree](#).

Human exposure to a potentially rabid animal

Veterinarians have a duty to report any potential rabies cases and/or rabies exposures (bite and non-bite) to their [Local Public Health Unit](#) under the Health Protection and Promotion Act (Reg. 567).

Domestic animal exposure to a potentially rabid animal with no human exposure

Animal owners should contact their local veterinarian as the first step for any animal health concerns.

Veterinarians can submit a request for assistance online using the [rabies response request form](#).

Abnormal wildlife with no domestic animal exposure and no human exposure

For assistance with a live animal, contact a local animal/wildlife control agency.

For dead terrestrial wildlife, call the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) Rabies Infoline (1-888-574-6656).

If a freshly dead bat is found, consider contacting the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative (1-866-673-4781).

Diagnosis

Veterinarians who examine a dog, cat or ferret recently imported into Canada should acquire and scrutinize a copy of the animal's previous vaccination record and/or health certificate and ensure the animal is currently vaccinated against rabies if it is over 3 months of age.

If there is any question regarding the validity of the animal's documentation or the reliability of any previous vaccinations (in terms of product used, route of administration, age at administration or any other concerns), then the animal should be revaccinated for rabies as soon as possible and a new vaccination certificate issued by the attending veterinarian. Under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* (Reg. 567), only vaccination by a veterinarian (or their authorized delegate) in the United States or Canada using a product licenced for use in the jurisdiction where it was given is considered valid in Ontario.

Vaccination prior to importation is intended to help protect dogs from rabies exposure **after** arrival in Canada. It does **not** reliably prevent rabies in a dog that was exposed to the virus prior to vaccination and import. The typical incubation period for rabies in a dog can be up to 6 months.

Prevention

Veterinarians need to remain vigilant for cases of domestic animal exposure to potentially rabid animals. There continues to be a risk of incursion of fox rabies from northern regions of the province and of raccoon rabies from New York State. Translocation of rabid animals from distant areas on vehicles is also possible. Contact with rabid bats is a risk in all regions.

The best protection against rabies for both domestic animals and people is to avoid contact with potentially rabid wildlife and to keep domestic animals up to date on rabies vaccination. Rabies vaccination for dogs, cats and ferrets is a regulatory requirement in all health units in the province as of July 2018. Rabies vaccination is also required for horses, cattle and sheep that have contact with members of the general public and should be considered for any livestock in high-risk areas. If you suspect a domestic animal (pet or livestock) may have recently been exposed to rabies and it is not possible to have the animal tested, it should be vaccinated (or revaccinated) as soon as possible regardless of the animal's vaccination status at the time.

It is also important that veterinarians, and any other individuals who may be at high-risk of exposure to rabies-infected animals, receive pre-exposure rabies vaccinations, as per the [Canadian Immunization Guide](#). Veterinary clinics should be reminded to use good infection control and prevention measures around animals showing signs consistent with rabies, to minimize potential exposures to themselves and their care teams.

Additional information

[Ontario rabies information for veterinarians](#)

[Ministry of Natural Resources: Rabies](#)

Ontario Animal Health Network: [Bats in Ontario](#)

Ministry of Health: [Public Health Unit locator](#)

Ontario Health Protection and Promotion Act (R.R.O 1990) regulations:

- [Communicable diseases - General \(Reg. 557\)](#)
- [Rabies immunization \(Reg. 567\)](#)

Canadian Food Inspection Agency: [Rabies cases in Canada](#)