

US Rabies Cases 2008

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention published 2008 data on 6,841 confirmed animal rabies cases in 49 states and Puerto Rico. (Hawaii is rabies-free.) Of these, 93 percent were confirmed in wildlife; 7 percent in domestic species. These represent a fraction of the total number of rabid animals in the US since many cases are not observed and are undetected.

All states (except Hawaii) and Puerto Rico have confirmed cases of rabies in domestic and/or wild animals. Thirty positive horse/mule rabies cases were reported in 2008 from Alabama (1); Arizona (1); Delaware (1); Florida (2); Georgia (1); Kansas (2); Kentucky (2); Massachusetts (1); Maryland (2); Missouri (1); North Dakota (1); Nebraska (2); New York (1); Oklahoma (1); Puerto Rico (1); Rhode Island (1); South Dakota (2); Tennessee (1); Texas (4); and Virginia (2).

Rabies is a viral disease that affects mammalian species. In the continental US, the primary reservoirs of rabies are raccoons, skunks, foxes and bats. In Puerto Rico, the mongoose is the wildlife reservoir. Bat rabies was reported in all states except Hawaii, Alaska, New Mexico and Puerto Rico; however, within the past five years, rabid bats have been confirmed in all 49 states.

Two human cases of rabies were confirmed in California and Missouri, both attributed to the bat variant of rabies virus.

Because rabies is a zoonotic disease, one rabid horse can expose many humans prior to diagnosis, necessitating post-exposure human rabies vaccinations costing thousands of dollars. No post-exposure rabies vaccinations exist for exposed animals. Rabies is one of the core vaccinations recommended by the American Association of Equine Practitioners. Any horse showing behavioral changes or neurologic clinical signs should be promptly seen by a veterinarian.

Blanton, JD, Robertson, K, Palmer, D., et al. (2009) Rabies surveillance in the United States during 2008. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 235:676-689.

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