

Rabies Surveillance, 2006-2007



Summary

- In Baltimore City, the percent of animals that tested positive for rabies between January and September 2007 was 33% higher than during the same period in 2006.
- The number of individuals reported to the Baltimore City Health Department following exposure to potentially rabid animals tripled between January and August of 2007.

Background

Rabies is a viral disease that affects the central nervous system of mammals. Rabies is almost always fatal among animals that exhibit symptoms of infection.

The virus is found in the saliva of rabid animals and is usually transmitted through bites. In Maryland, rabies is most commonly found in wild animals such as raccoons or bats.

Human rabies cases remain extremely rare: the last case in Maryland was in 1976. In 2006, there were three reported human cases nationwide.

The Percent of Animals Testing Positive for Rabies Has Increased

From January 1 to September 19, 2007, 18 animals out of 460 (4%) tested positive for rabies in Baltimore City, compared to 13 positive animals out of 388 tested (3%) during the same period in 2006. This constitutes a 33% increase in rabies positivity among tested animals.

Jan 1-Sep 19		Bats	Foxes	Raccoons	Other*	All
2007	T	175	12	52	221	460
	P	11	2	5	0	18
	% P	6%	2%	10.0%	0%	4%
2006	T	136	10	54	188	388
	P	5	1	7	0	13
	% P	4%	10%	13%	0%	3%

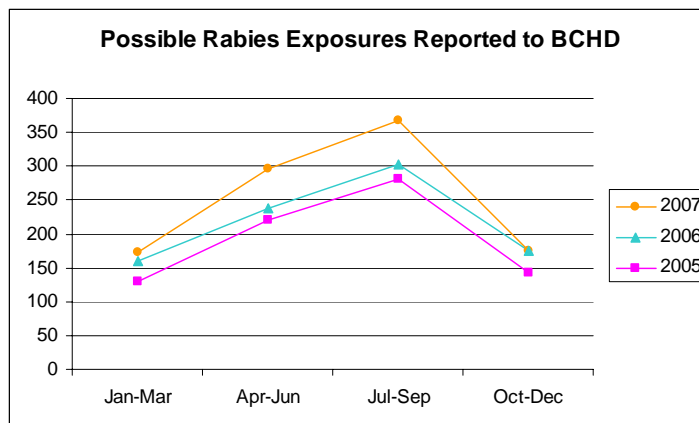
Source: Baltimore City Health Department Animal Control

T: # Tested; P: # Testing Positive; %P: % Positive

*"Other" includes cats, chinchillas, dogs, moles, opossums, rats, and squirrels

The Number of Humans Exposed to Potentially Rabid Animals Has Increased

Though seasonal patterns persist, the overall number of individuals reported to the Health Department following exposure to potentially rabid animals has increased over the past three years. An individual who has had either bite or non-bite contact with a potentially infected animal is considered an exposure until the animal tests negative.



Source: Baltimore City Health Department Adult, School, & Community Health Division

How Does Baltimore Compare?

In 2006, 414 animals tested positive for rabies in Maryland, a 7% increase from the previous year. There were no confirmed cases of human rabies.²

In 2006, a national total of 6,940 animal rabies cases and three human rabies cases were reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This marked an 8% increase in overall reported human and animal cases from the previous year.³

Take Steps to Prevent Infection

- Keep all pets up-to-date on rabies vaccinations; walk them on leashes and do not let them roam free.
- If a pet has been in a fight with another animal, wear gloves while handling it. Keep it away from people and other animals and call a veterinarian or City Services to report the potential animal exposure.
- Use metal garbage cans with secure lids to keep raccoons and other animals from scavenging.
- Seal any openings through which animals could enter a home, such as chimneys, basements, porch holes, and dryer vents. Use window screens and make sure they are intact.
- If a wild animal is caught indoors, confine it without handling it and call City Services or the Maryland Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Nuisance Hotline for assistance.
- Avoid contact with stray, wild, or unfamiliar animals.
- Learn to recognize the signs that may indicate an animal is rabid:
 - Raccoons are not typically active during the day
 - Bats that are seen during the day or that cannot fly could be rabid

- A rabid animal can become either unnaturally approachable or withdrawn, as well as overly excited, irritable, or aggressive
- Convulsions or frothing at the mouth are possible indications of infection
- Bats have small, sharp teeth that may not leave visible puncture wounds or cause noticeable pain. Report any contact with bats to City Services.
- All bite or scratch wounds should be washed immediately with soap and water and attended to by a medical professional. A healthcare provider can determine the necessity of postexposure prophylaxis, which consists of a series of rabies vaccinations and a rabies immune globulin injection.⁴

Important Contacts and Resources

For pet vaccination, call the Baltimore City Health Department's Bureau of Animal Control at (410) 396-4688.

For animal pickup, call City Services at 311 or the Maryland Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Nuisance Hotline at (877) 463-6497.

To report an animal bite, call City Services at 311.

For more information on rabies, visit the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's rabies web site: http://www.edcp.org/vet_med/rabies.html.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/history.html>
2. Blanton, Jesse D., Hanlon, Cathleen A., Rupprecht, Charles E. Rabies surveillance in the United States during 2006. *Vet Med Today: Public Veterinary Medicine, JAVMA*. 2007;231:543
3. Rabies surveillance in the United States during 2006. 2007;231:540
4. <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/qanda/general.html#h3>

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