

[Rabies](#) is a deadly viral disease of the brain primarily spread through bites from infected animals. In Vermont, rabies is most commonly found in wild animals such as raccoons, skunks, foxes, bats and woodchucks. Cats, dogs and livestock can also get rabies if they have not been vaccinated for rabies. Vermont's Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program tracks and responds to rabies virus in animals. Throughout the year, the [Vermont Department of Health Laboratory](#) (VDHL) tests animals that may have exposed humans or domestic animals to rabies. With this information, Vermont Department of Health can provide appropriate postexposure recommendations to Vermonters and their animals.

2021 Rabies Testing by the Numbers

Total Animals Tested

588

Rabid Animals

18

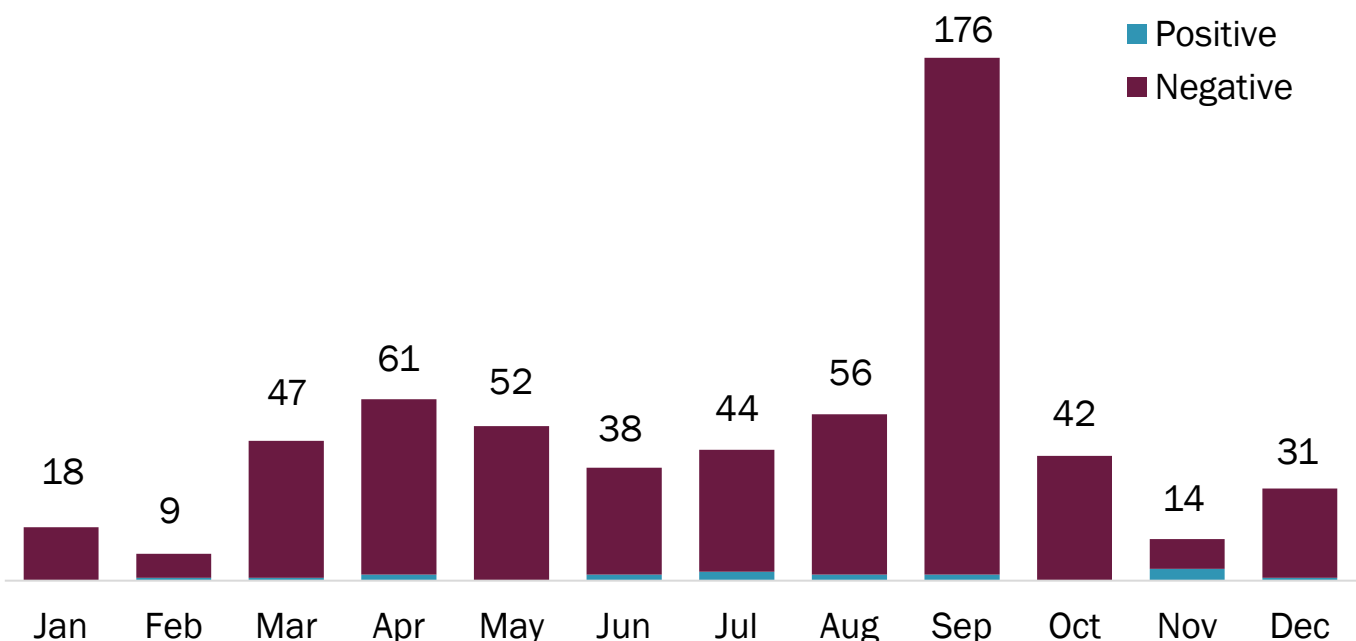
Percent Positive

3.1%

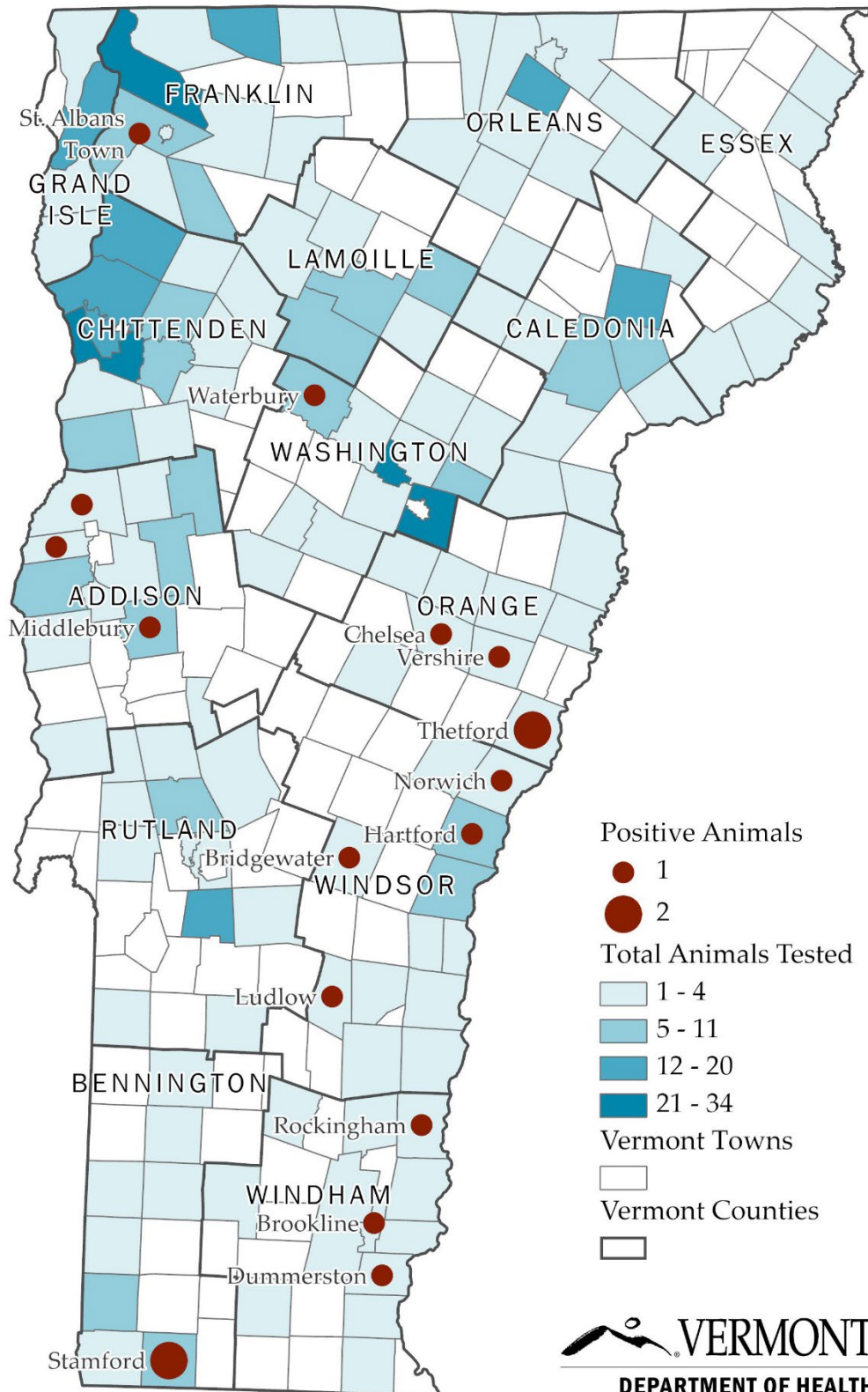
Rabies Testing Results

- 588 animals were collected from 159 towns across Vermont
- 18 (3.1%) animals tested positive for rabies in 2021: four raccoons, four bats, three skunks, three foxes, two cats, one bobcat, and one cow
- Animals with the highest positivity rate were cows (1/5; 20%), followed by foxes (3/24; 12.5%), bats (4/93; 4.3%), cats (2/52; 3.8%), and bobcats (1/28; 3.6%)
- Raccoons and skunks were tested most frequently, 179 and 125 animals, respectively

Animals were tested throughout the year in 2021, but most were submitted during September because of high bat activity.



**Animals were collected throughout the state in 2021,
and 18 tested positive for rabies.**



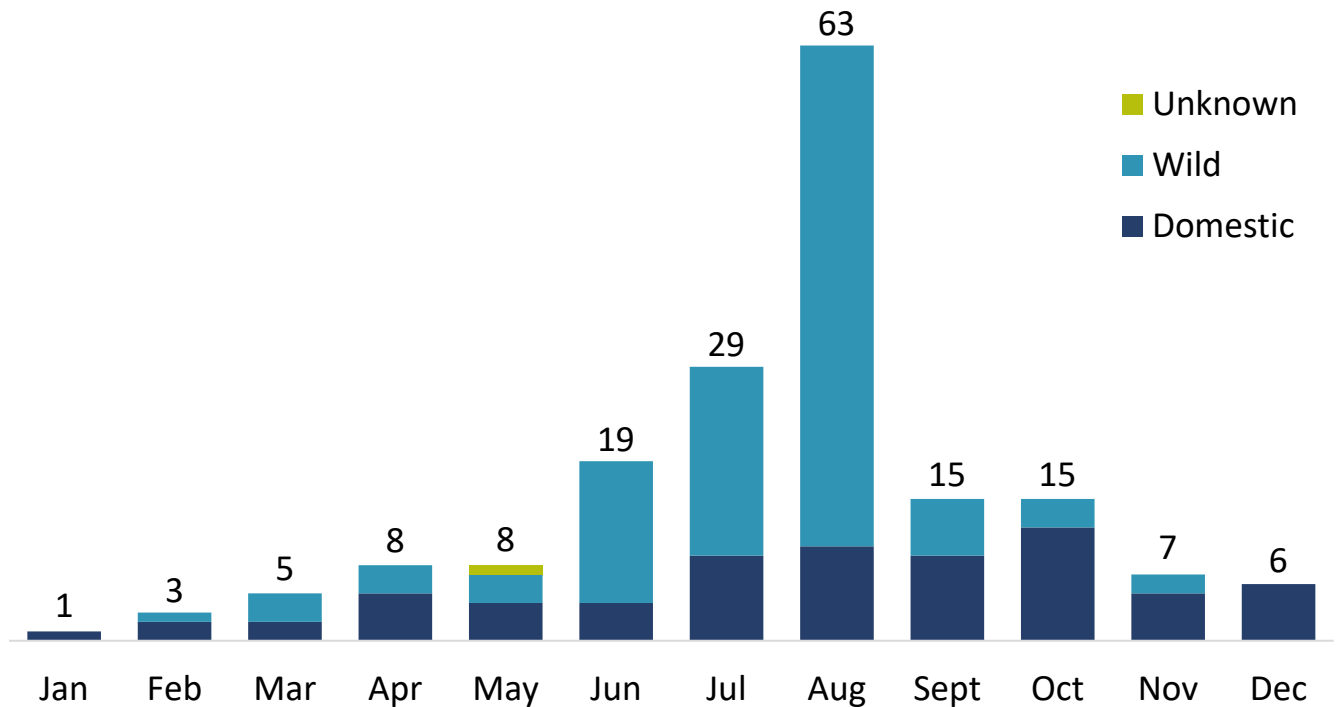
Rabies Postexposure Prophylaxis Surveillance

[Rabies Postexposure Prophylaxis \(rPEP\)](#) is a treatment that is highly effective in preventing human rabies following exposure to rabies virus. This involves wound care and a series of injections given by a medical provider. Decisions to start rPEP are based on [type of exposure](#), the [animal type](#), [whether the animal is available for testing](#), and the geographic area where the exposure occurred.

Health care providers must report the administration of rPEP by faxing a completed [Rabies Postexposure Prophylaxis Report Form](#) to the Health Department’s Epidemiology Program at 802-951-4061 or securely e-mailing it to AHS.VDHEpiLabRabies@vermont.gov.

- In 2021, health care providers reported 179 administrations of rPEP in Vermonters
- rPEP was administered most commonly because of exposure to bats (n=98; 54.7%), followed by dogs (n=36; 20.1%), and cats (n=28; 15.6%)
- The median age of patients receiving rPEP in 2021 was 32 years (range: 9 months–84 years); 60.8% were female

In 2021, rabies postexposure prophylaxis (rPEP) was administered more frequently during summer months and most often following exposure to wild animals.



Key Takeaways

Rabies is a threat in Vermont. To protect yourself and your family, remember these tips:

- If an animal bites you or your pet, contact your health care provider or veterinarian for medical assistance
- Do not touch or pick up unfamiliar or wild animals – even baby animals – or try to feed them or make them into pets
- While only a small percentage of bats are infected with rabies, they are the leading cause of human rabies in the United States. If you find a bat in a room where a person or pet was sleeping, call the Vermont Rabies Hotline at 1-800-4-Rabies. Do not release the bat, and only try to capture it if you can do so without getting bitten

Rabies is a deadly virus primarily spread through the bites of wild animals. If you have had contact with a suspect rabid animal, call the Vermont Rabies Hotline at 1-800-4-RABIES (1-800-472-2437)
