

# Clinton County Profiles in Public Health: RABIES

Summer 2023

## OVERVIEW

Compared with state and national statistics, the incidence of rabies disease within Clinton County is low. However, because rabies is fatal, the disease continues to pose a significant threat to our community. Ongoing efforts to stop the spread of rabies are necessary to keep our community safe and healthy.

The rabies virus infects wildlife, especially bats, raccoons, skunks and foxes. Rabies is transmitted from the saliva of an infected animal, and can spread to people and pets when they are bitten, causing fever, agitation and death. The virus is **100% preventable** with post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) that includes rabies vaccine and medications to fight infection, as long as people get PEP *before* symptoms start. Understanding the risk and knowing what to do after contact with wildlife or being bitten by a domestic animal can save lives.

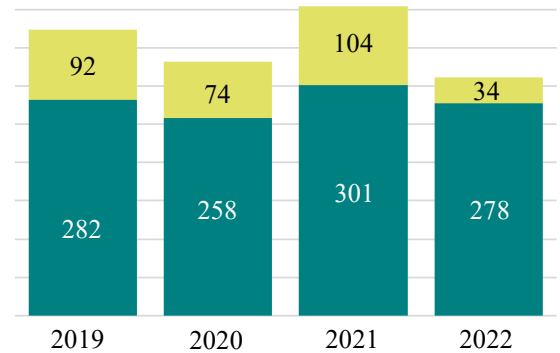
The Clinton County Health Department (CCHD) leads local efforts to control rabies. The Rabies Prevention Program involves both CCHD's Divisions of Environmental Health & Safety (EHS) and Health Care Services (HCS). Program staff follow State Public Health Law to investigate animal bite reports, facilitate testing of animal specimens for rabies, provide pet rabies vaccination clinics, offer rabies prevention education to the community, and recommend and administer PEP for exposed persons. In addition, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) conducts regional oral vaccination bait drops, as part of the National Rabies Management Program.

## RABIES PREVENTION BY THE NUMBERS, CLINTON COUNTY

### INVESTIGATIONS

■ Animal bite investigations ■ Non-bite investigations

CCHD investigated  
**312**  
potential rabies exposures in 2022.

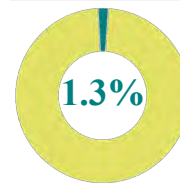


### ANIMALS TESTED FOR RABIES VIRUS

From 2019 to 2022:



animals were tested for rabies.



(6) of those tested were positive for rabies.



of animals testing positive for rabies were **bats**.

Nationally, **6%** of animals tested annually are positive for rabies; about **90%** of those are wildlife. In NYS (excluding NYC), **4.40%** (330) of animals tested in 2021 (5,223) were positive for rabies.

**In 2021, 5 people died from rabies**, the highest number of deaths from rabies in the US in over a decade. All deaths were caused by mishandling bats and delaying PEP.



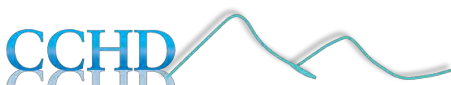
### POST-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PEP)

Number of individuals who received post-exposure vaccine from CCHD, by year



2019	2020	2021	2022
58	26	18	18

Nationally, about **55,000** Americans receive PEP each year, at an average cost of **\$3,800** per person (not including costs for hospital treatment or wound care).



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## ADDITIONAL RABIES PREVENTION EFFORTS IN CLINTON COUNTY

### RABIES CLINICS

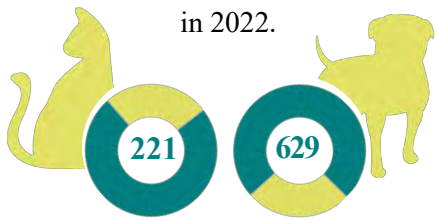
Preventing rabies exposure in domestic pets through vaccination is vital to reducing the chance of rabies exposure in humans. Dogs, once the leading cause of human rabies deaths in the US, now account for only **1%** of rabid animals reported each year.

To increase vaccination rates of pets in Clinton County, CCHD offers free rabies clinics to residents. Several clinics are held each year at varied locations throughout the county. A schedule of clinics is available at [www.clintonhealth.org/rabiesclinics](http://www.clintonhealth.org/rabiesclinics).

CCHD administered

**877**

rabies vaccines  
in 2022.



### ORAL RABIES VACCINE (ORV) BAIT DROPS

A large-scale effort to control rabies in wildlife known to carry the disease is led by the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). The national wildlife vaccination program scatters ORV baits in targeted areas across the US, including parts of Clinton County.

In Clinton County, high numbers of raccoons make it more likely that a human, a pet or farm animal will encounter a rabid raccoon. Use of ORV has helped control raccoon rabies in our community.

In 2019, more than  
**28,000**

ORV baits were distributed by airplane and vehicle throughout areas of Clinton County.

### EDUCATION

Education is a key component of rabies prevention efforts. Understanding the risk for rabies transmission, the need for timely administration of PEP to prevent death, and the importance of leaving wildlife that is known to carry the rabies virus alone is critical. In addition, if a bat is found in a home, catching and testing it can prevent potentially unnecessary PEP and associated costs. Many education messages also focus on the importance of vaccinating pets against rabies. CCHD's website offers links to current information on rabies from the CDC and local rabies clinics, but the department shares rabies education using many approaches.

In 2022, rabies messages were delivered through:



**1**

media releases



**200+**

Summer Safety Guides



**1**

radio interview



**15**

social media messages

## MOBILIZING ACTION

### Recommendations for Residents, Health Professionals and Community Leaders

#### RESIDENTS

- **Leave all wildlife alone, including bats, raccoons, foxes, skunks and feral cats.** Do not attract wildlife by leaving pet food outdoors.
- **Vaccinate your pets** and livestock to protect them and your family.
- **If you are bitten by a wild animal, seek medical care.** Talk to a health care provider or CCHD about whether you need PEP. **DO NOT WAIT!**
- If you are bitten by a domestic animal, get the owner's contact information and seek medical care.
- If you find a bat in your house, safely capture it and call CCHD.

#### HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

- Educate patients on rabies prevention, **prompt** notification of an animal bite or potential rabies exposure, and the need for timely PEP.
- **Notify CCHD immediately if a patient is bitten by a wild or domestic animal.**
- Encourage patients to vaccinate their pets.
- Instruct patients to avoid contact with all animals when traveling internationally and to **seek medical care immediately if they are bitten.**

#### COMMUNITY LEADERS

- Support programs to increase rabies vaccination rates of domestic pets and wildlife, such as rabies clinics and ORV bait drops.
- Communicate and work with leaders across jurisdictional borders to maintain awareness of current rabies related activity.
- Review state and federal issued reports on rabies patterns.

