VERMONT
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

2023 Rabies Surveillance Report

March 2024

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. The Vermont Department of Health 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, the Department of Health can provide appropriate postexposure recommendations to Vermonters and their animals.

2023 Rabies Testing by the Numbers

Total Animals Tested
802

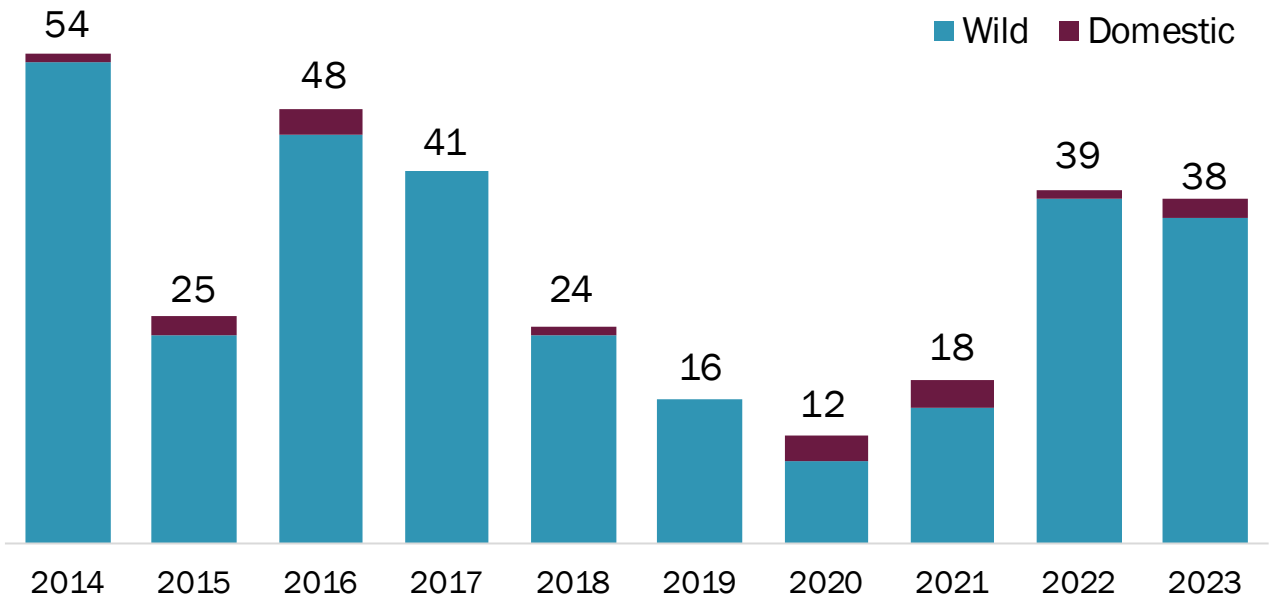
Rabid Animals
38

Percent Positive
4.7%

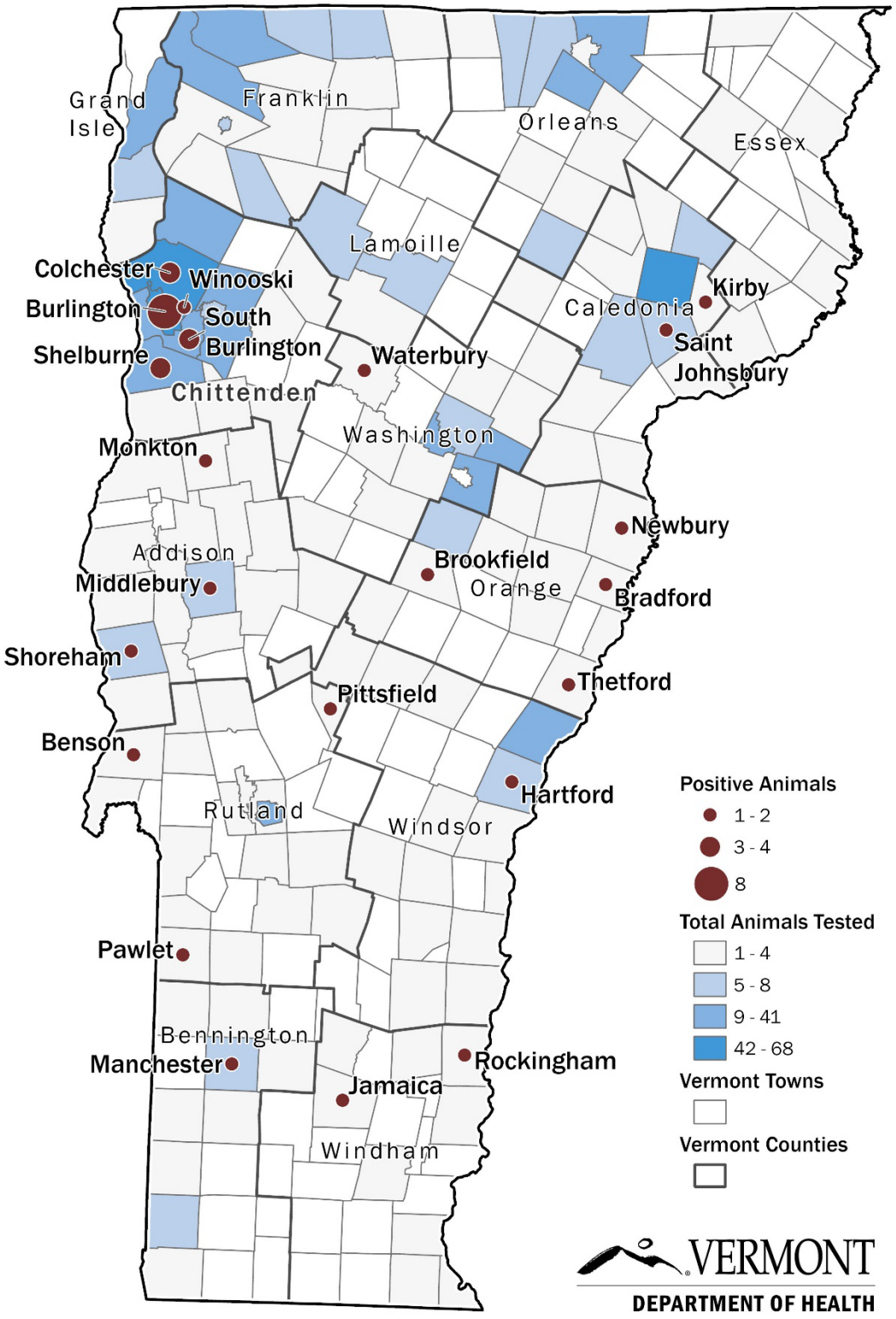
Rabies Testing Results

- 802 animals from 157 towns across Vermont were tested and 38 (4.7%) animals were positive: 17 raccoons, eight skunks, seven foxes, three bats, two cats, and one woodchuck
- Compared to 2022, this represents a 130% increase in the total animals tested (n=615) but a similar number of positives (n=39)
- 20 (53%) rabid animals were collected from Chittenden County due to a localized outbreak in the greater Burlington area
- Animals with the highest positivity rates were woodchucks (1/1; 100%), foxes (7/29; 24%), raccoons (17/250; 7%), skunks (8/221; 4%), and cats (2/55; 4%)
- Raccoons and skunks were tested most frequently, 250 and 221 animals, respectively

Most cases of rabies are in wild animals, and 38 animals tested positive for rabies in 2023.



Animals from throughout the state were tested for rabies in 2023, and 38 were positive for rabies, mostly from Chittenden County.



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.

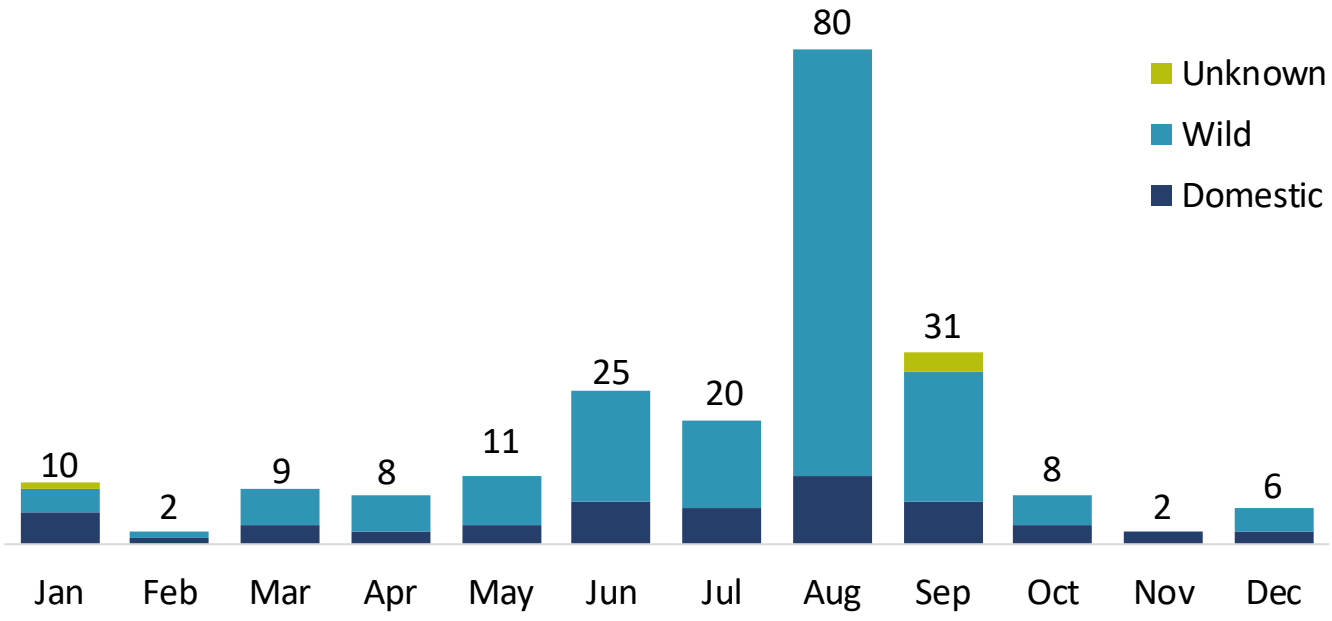
Decisions to start rPEP are based on type of exposure, the animal type, whether the animal is available for testing or monitoring, and the geographic location where the exposure occurred. Health care providers should call the Vermont Department of Health at 802-863-7240 prior to administering rPEP to determine if it is necessary.

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.

rPEP Surveillance Results

- In 2023, health care providers reported 212 administrations of rPEP in Vermonters
- rPEP was administered most commonly because of exposure to bats (n=132; 63%), followed by dogs (n=31; 15%), cats (n=19; 9%), and raccoons (n=15; 7%)
- The median age of patients who received rPEP in 2023 was 34 years (range: 1–89 years); 57% were female

In 2023, rabies postexposure prophylaxis (rPEP) was administered more frequently during summer months following exposure to wild animals, mostly bats.



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)