



World Rabies Day

Rabies Prevention Behind the Scenes

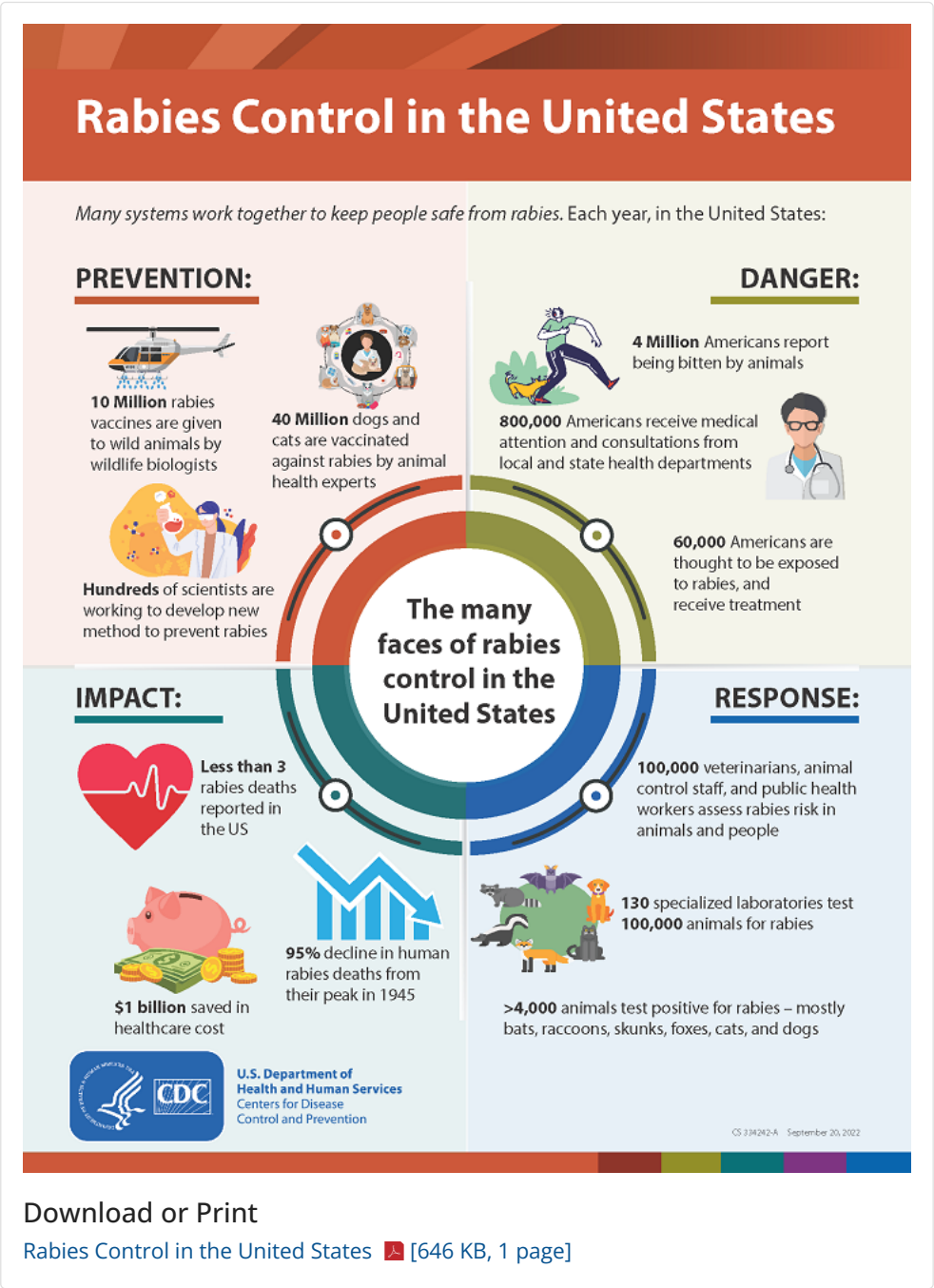
September 28 is World Rabies Day. Established in 2007, World Rabies Day aims to raise awareness about the world’s deadliest infectious disease and help the world come together to fight the disease. The theme for 2023’s World Rabies Day is “*Rabies: All for One, One Health for All*,” and focuses on:

- Continuing to work towards eliminating rabies around the world
- Embracing the One Health approach to rabies control, which means collaborating across human, animal, and environmental sectors
- Focusing on the “Zero by 30” goal to reduce rabies deaths in people to zero globally by 2030.

In the United States, rabies deaths in people are very rare thanks to successful animal control and vaccination programs, and a robust healthcare structure that can provide rabies vaccines to people shortly after they have contact with a possibly rabid animal. Each year, 4 million Americans are bitten by animals but very few people develop symptoms and later die from rabies. These systems work together to prevent rabies in people. About 60,000 Americans get postexposure prophylaxis (PEP) shots each year to prevent rabies infection after being bitten or scratched by an infected or an animal suspected of being infected. The good news is that rabies can be prevented through vaccination of both animals and people.

While rabies is well controlled in the United States, globally nearly 60,000 people die each year due to rabies. Most of these deaths are in children. To reduce the risk of rabies abroad, CDC is a member of the International Rabies Taskforce, a public-private partnership with the organization Mission Rabies and vaccine manufacturer Merck Animal Health. As a result of this partnership, over 450,000 dogs have been vaccinated against rabies and 20,000 suspected rabies cases have been investigated so far in 2023.

On World Rabies Day, we can renew our commitment to eliminate human rabies deaths in people. *You* can help by [keeping pets up to date on their rabies vaccination](#), and by collaborating with doctors, veterinarians, educators, community workers, policy makers, and others in your community to share facts and raise awareness around rabies prevention and control.



Prevention

In the United States, a tremendous effort goes into prevention rabies across multiple sectors from the public to local, state, and federal organizations, healthcare sectors, veterinary sectors, and many more. Wildlife biologists work to distribute more than 8 million rabies vaccine baits to [wild animals](#) to halt virus transmission at its source. Veterinary professionals vaccinate more than 40 million cats and dogs each year, helping to keep these animals and their families protected from rabies. Humane societies and other organizations provide re-homing services to stray animals, keeping them off the streets and reducing the spread of rabies virus. Numerous scientists work to develop new methods to prevent rabies, such as new vaccines and treatments for people.



Jordona Kirby, Rabies Field Coordinator
United States Department of Agriculture, Wildlife Services, National Rabies Management Program

I have worked on wildlife rabies management for over 15 years as a field coordinator and team lead for enhanced rabies surveillance and communications. As field coordinator, I spearhead operational logistics and planning for landscape-level distribution of oral rabies vaccine (ORV) baits to prevent the spread of wildlife rabies in the eastern US. ORV baits contain a vaccine to protect animals and stop the spread of rabies in wildlife. Annually, I help facilitate the distribution of more than 8 million ORV baits by airplanes, helicopters, and vehicles across 48,000 square miles in 13 states, equating to an area bigger than the size of the state of New York. ORV baiting is an important part of rabies management because wildlife account for more than 90% of all reported rabies cases annually in the U.S. By preventing rabies in wildlife, we help protect people, pets, and livestock.



Miguel Abi-hassan, Chief Animal Rescue, Care and Sanctuaries (ARCS) Officer
Humane Society of the United States

As an ARCS officer, I lead the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) work to rescue animals from cruel conditions and disasters, manage animal care and veterinary centers and operate programs to bridge the gap between animal service providers and millions of people and pets living in poverty.

The HSUS prioritizes rabies prevention in companion animals (pets) and wildlife in animal sanctuaries as a mainstay of our work to reduce animal suffering and ensure human health and safety. In every function of our direct-care programs—our rescue, access to care, and sanctuary work—we administer rabies vaccines to animals as early as possible. In our community-based programs, we ensure rabies vaccines are affordable and accessible to the public even where private veterinary care is not available nearby. We consistently champion proper vaccination protocols as an essential component of proper animal care. We engage in these practices because proactive rabies prevention reduces animal suffering, human-wildlife conflicts, the need for quarantines and peoples’ fear of animals, further strengthening the bond between humans and animals.

Danger

While rabies is well controlled in the United States, over 4 million Americans report being bitten by animals each year. Of those, 800,000 receive medical attention and consultations from local or state health departments. Medical providers and public health officials must weigh the cost and availability of rabies vaccines against the fact that rabies nearly always leads to death if people don't receive vaccine prior to the start of rabies symptoms. This is accomplished through interviews with bite victims, veterinary assessment of animals that have bitten someone, testing of animals by laboratory experts, and dissemination of [epidemiologic data](#) about where rabies cases are occurring by public health officials.



Theresa (Terri) McCollister, Rabies Prevention Team Lead
South Carolina Department of Health Environmental Control

I have worked for the South Carolina Department of Health Environmental Control (SC DHEC) within the Rabies Prevention Program since 2017. I serve as the statewide technical advisor for SC DHEC and it is my responsibility to enforce the South Carolina Rabies Control Act and provide guidance to team members and citizens, as needed. I am responsible for creating and maintaining rabies related resources such as [animal bite report forms](#) [1.6 MB, 3 pages], [educational outreach materials](#), program directives, standard operating procedures, [webpages](#), [rabies testing data](#), and [media releases](#). Additionally, I help [coordinate low-cost rabies vaccine clinics with state veterinarians](#) and response activities for rabies positive cases with regional team members, CDC, regional Medical Directors, and state Epidemiologists. I also maintain the afterhours and holiday rabies reporting hotline that connects citizens and medical personnel directly with a member of the South Carolina rabies prevention team. My goal is to encourage and empower forward-looking, creative solutions to promote and protect the health of the public and the environment.



Dr. Kunal Sukhija, Emergency Room Physician
Visalia, CA

I am an ER doctor who takes care of patients who were bitten by potentially rabid animals. Every year, my colleagues and I are tasked with preventing the spread of rabies, not only by educating patients, but with direct delivery of the rabies immunoglobulin and vaccine that prevent infection. Rabies is such a devastating disease, but the widespread availability of preventative treatment has effectively made it an illness of the past in the United States. It's an amazing privilege for our communities, and I'm humbled on a near daily basis when I consider the tools we have available to fight rabies at the first point of healthcare contact. The many healthcare providers around the country are critical in the effort to protect patients against rabies.

Response

Veterinarians, animal control, and public health workers help to assess the risk of rabies in animals and people who may have been bitten or scratched by an animal. There are more than 130 labs that test nearly 100,000 animals for rabies each year. In a typical year, over 4,000 animals test positive for rabies – mostly bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes, cats, and dogs.



Emanuel Maciel, Director of Animal Control
City of New Bedford Massachusetts

I have been an animal control officer for over 24 years. I have also been the President of the Animal Control Officers Association of Massachusetts and a Past Board Member of the National Animal Care & Control Association of the United States. As an animal control officer, we come across people daily who ask why their animals need vaccines or a license. It is my job to explain to them it's not only about the protection of their animal but also protecting their family and community from getting rabies and other diseases. We run two rabies clinics a year where we vaccinate about 300-400 animals in our community. Not every pet owner has access to veterinary services, and the people who attend these rabies clinics are very appreciative of getting their dogs and cats vaccinated.



Kathryn Fitzpatrick, Assistant Bureau Chief, Microbiology and Molecular Diagnostics
Arizona State Public Health Laboratory

The Arizona State Public Health Laboratory (ASPHL) has been performing rabies testing on suspected rabid wild, livestock and domesticated animals since the 1940s and continues to be the primary laboratory in Arizona for rabies diagnostic testing. Rabies testing at the APSHL can take on several different roles such as, diagnostic testing to dictate treatment for a person or animal that was exposed to rabies, active surveillance of rabies in wild animals when increased activity is observed, and characterizing rabies virus strains to determine rapid public health intervention to prevent additional rabies exposures. In addition to rabies testing, we work closely with animal control officers and local/county health departments to provide technical assistance for animal collection and submission for rabies testing. We also actively participate with other rabies prevention partners to improve rabies testing and surveillance in the state.

Impact

As a result of the public health infrastructure put in place for rabies control in the United States, typically fewer than 3 human rabies deaths are reported each year. The control measures put in place results in more than \$1 billion dollars in healthcare savings, largely due to the ability to rule out the need for rabies PEP for people after assessing their risk of rabies after a bite or scratch, or after testing the possibly rabid animal.

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Source: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases \(NCEZID\), Division of High-Consequence Pathogens and Pathology \(DHCPP\)](#)