

Summary of Rabies Testing Results in British Columbia 2026 Update

Key Messages

In 2025:

- 8 specimens submitted to the CFIA for rabies testing following contact with humans and/or domestic animals were positive, all of which were bats. The number of submitted specimens with reported human and/or domestic animal contact have increased since 2023. In 2025, 237 specimen submissions to the CFIA for rabies testing reported human and/or domestic animal contact.
- Domestic cats continued to represent a comparatively large proportion of submissions for rabies testing compared to other non-bat species, especially in submissions with human-only contact. While this pattern was evident in previous years, the proportion of cat submissions was further elevated in 2025 (22% in 2025 vs <17% in 2023 and 2024). This may be due to increased media attention that resulted from a false positive feline rabies case in BC that was reported in 2025.

Between 2000 and 2025, the number of rabies-positive specimens with reported human or domestic animal contact has remained low overall.

- Of submissions with human and/or animal contact, bats represented the majority of total submissions (70%) as well as the majority of rabies-positive animal submissions (97%).
- The annual proportion of bat submissions with human and/or domestic animal contact that tested positive for rabies ranged from 1.2% to 13.6% annually (median: 7.1%).

Additional things to know:

- Multiple consecutive annual increases in the number of specimen submissions with human or animal contact were apparent in years during and/or after rabies cases in humans (one in 2003 and one in 2019) and domestic animals (one cat in 2007) were reported in BC. One feline rabies case was initially reported in 2025 but was later determined to be a false positive by the CFIA rabies laboratory.
- All human rabies cases in Canada since 1967 have resulted from exposure to bats or were acquired during travel to another country.
- Over the past five years, seasonal increases in the number of bat submissions with human or domestic animal contact increase in May, peak in July/August, and remain elevated until October.
- Keeping pets up to date with rabies vaccination is important both to prevent infection with rabies and to improve risk assessment and management of pets that develop neurological signs and/or demonstrate behaviours that could be compatible with rabies.

Background

Bats are the only known reservoir of rabies in British Columbia (BC), although importation of other infected animals and spillover from bats to other animals can also occur. Rabies poses a serious threat to human and animal health as rabies infection, if not treated in time, is almost always fatal once clinical symptoms appear. A robust surveillance and exposure management system is essential for detection, control, and prevention of rabies. Fortunately, cases of human rabies in BC remain rare.

In Canada, rabies management is the shared responsibility of the public, veterinary and health professionals, provincial and territorial authorities, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). The CFIA provides testing for animals that have potentially exposed a person or domestic animal to rabies in BC, as well as testing of suspect human cases. This report summarizes the results of rabies testing of human and animal specimens submitted to the CFIA Rabies Laboratory from BC between 2000 and 2025, with a focus on bats with documented human and/or domestic animal contact. Bats that encounter humans or domestic animals are more likely to carry rabies and pose a risk of transmitting rabies to humans and animals.

Findings

Rabies-positive submissions

In 2025, there were 237 submissions with human and/or domestic animal contact and 8 specimens tested positive, all of which were bats.

From 2000 to 2025:

- 188 specimens with human and/or domestic animal contact submitted to the CFIA for rabies testing were positive (Table 1).
- The majority (97%) of rabies-positive animal specimens with human and/or domestic animal contact were bats.

Other positive submissions with human and/or domestic animal contact include:

- Domestic cats (1 in 2007)
- Humans (1 in 2003 and 1 in 2019)
- Striped skunks (1 in 2004 and 1 in 2021)

Table 1. Annual number of rabies-positive specimens with human and/or domestic animal contact, by species, BC, 2000-2025.*

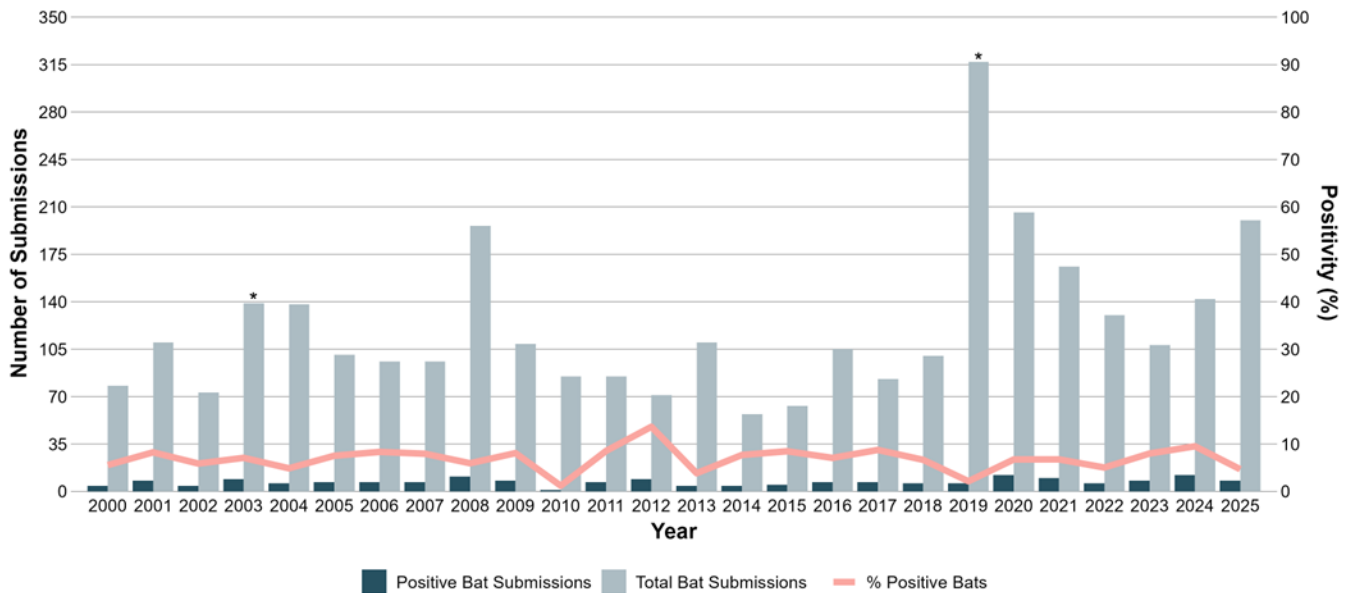
Year	Bats	Domestic Cats	Humans	Striped Skunks	Total Positive	Total Submissions
2000	4				4	164
2001	8				8	180
2002	4				4	142
2003	9		1		10	214
2004	6			1	7	220
2005	7				7	177
2006	7				7	163
2007	7	1			8	190
2008	11				11	291
2009	8				8	180
2010	1				1	133
2011	7				7	147
2012	9				9	124
2013	4				4	168
2014	4				4	81
2015	5				5	87
2016	7				7	128
2017	7				7	112
2018	6				6	120
2019	6		1		7	344
2020	12				12	235
2021	10			1	11	227
2022	6				6	163
2023	8				8	138
2024	12				12	166
2025	8				8	237
Total	183	1	2	2	188	4,531

*The total number positive and submitted specimens per year are available on the [CFIA website](#).

Submissions per year

The overall annual number of submitted specimens with reported human or domestic animal contact ranged from 81 to 344 per year (median: 165 specimens). Of these, the proportion that tested positive for rabies has remained low, ranging from 0.8% to 8.0% annually (median: 4.8%).

The number of bat submissions with reported human or domestic animal contact ranged from 57 to 317 per year (median: 107 specimens). Of these bat submissions, the proportion that tested positive for rabies ranged from 1.2% to 13.6% annually (median: 7.1%, Figure 1).



* Years in which human rabies cases were reported in British Columbia

Figure 1. Annual number of submitted and rabies-positive bats with reported human or domestic animal contact, BC, 2000 - 2025.

Seasonality of bat submissions

Bat submissions with reported human or domestic animal contact **typically increase from May to October, peaking in July/August** (Figure 2).

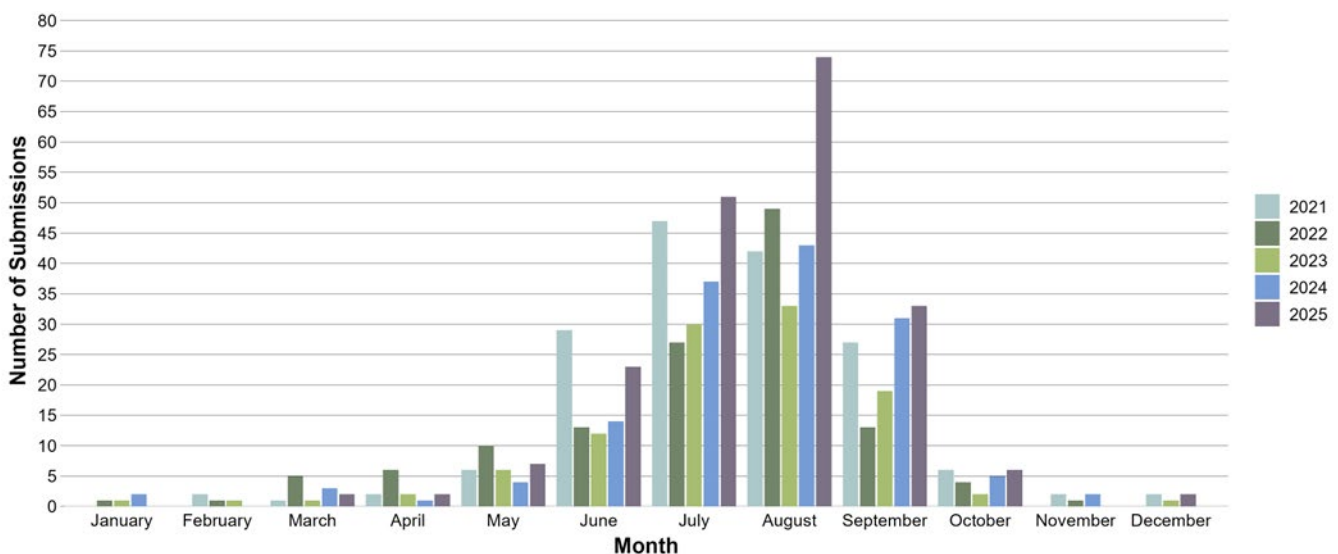


Figure 2. Submissions of bats with reported human or domestic animal contact by month, BC, 2021-2025.

This seasonal pattern may be explained by seasonal bat migration and activity patterns, depending on the species of bat (Brigham, 2021). Humans and their animals also tend to spend more time outdoors in the warmer months which increases opportunities for bat encounters.

Specimen submissions from 2025

207 submissions with reported human and/or domestic animal contact were tested by the CFIA. Of these:

- 8 (4%) bats tested positive,
- None of the non-bat submissions tested positive,
- 106 (51%) had contact with domestic animals only,
- 73 (35%) had contact with humans only, and
- 28 (14%) had contact with both humans and domestic animals.

Across all three groups (domestic animal contact only, both human and domestic animal contact, human contact only), **the majority of tested submissions were bats.**

Of those with human contact only, companion animal submissions were common with 22% (16 specimens) from cats and 12% (9 specimens) from dogs (Figure 3). There was higher diversity of species amongst submissions with human contact as compared to domestic animal contact only, with submissions from equines and raccoons in addition to bats, cats, and dogs.

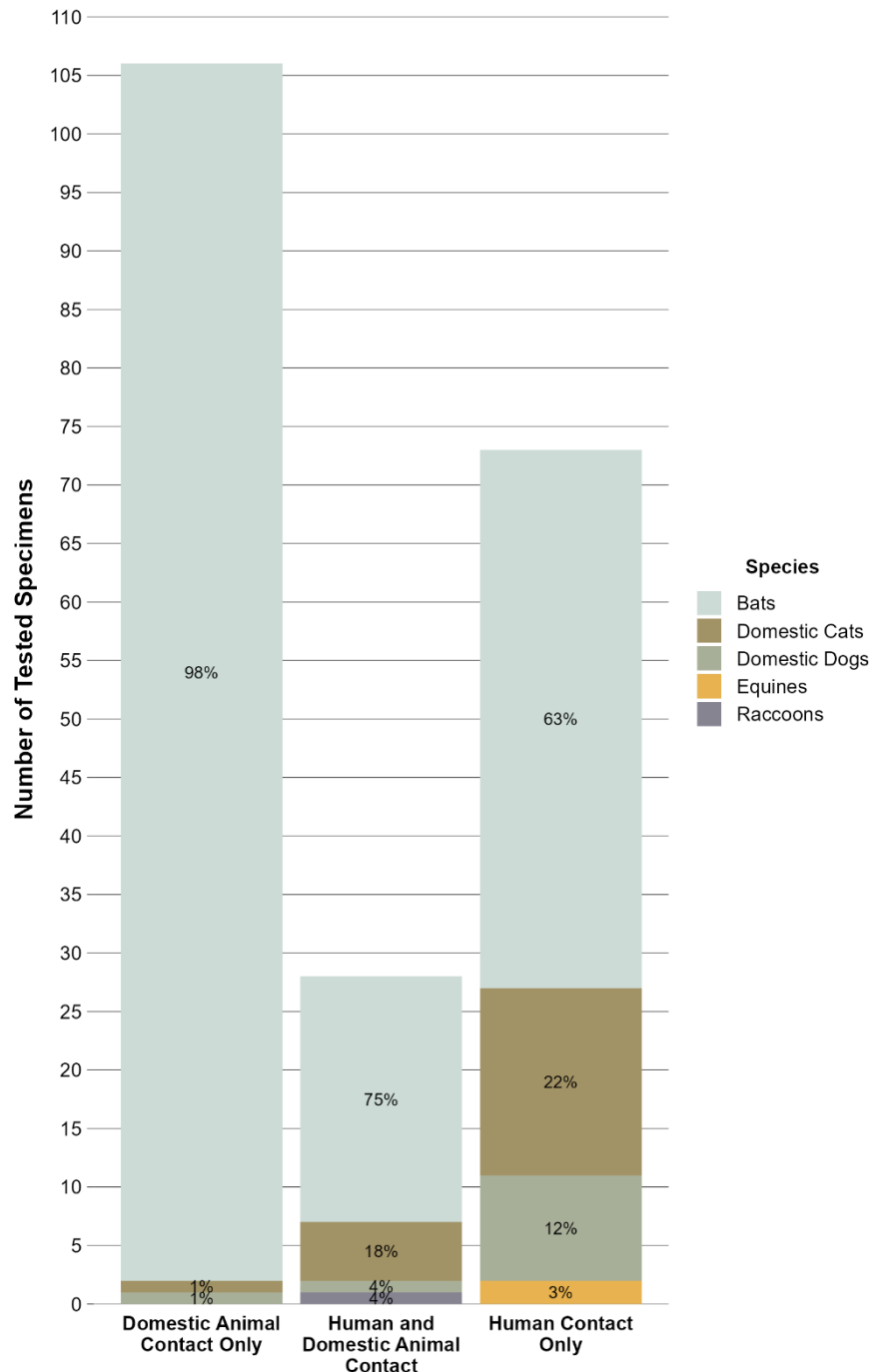


Figure 3. Number and proportion of tested submissions by species and contact type, BC, 2025.

Conclusion

- The incidence of rabies in BC has remained low.
- Bats are the only known reservoir of rabies in BC.
- In prior years, bat-variant rabies virus has also been detected in skunks, domestic cats, and humans, indicating rare spillover events, but there has been no evidence of continued transmission within these species in BC.
- The human rabies cases in 2003 and 2019 were both the result of direct contact with rabid bats.
- The number of bat submissions with reported human or domestic animal contact increased in the warmer months between May and October, highlighting a period of increased risk for rabies exposure.
- The increase in annual specimen submissions involving human or animal contact in years during and/or after rabies cases in humans and domestic animals have occurred may reflect a heightened perception of risk for infection after the positive cases were reported.
- Domestic cats and dogs represented comparatively large proportions of submissions with human contact only and submissions with human and domestic animal contact in 2025 compared to other non-bat species. It is important to keep household pets up-to-date with rabies vaccinations to prevent them getting rabies and passing it to humans and also to support exposure risk assessment and inform the appropriateness of testing domestic animals for rabies.

Additional Resources

- For more information on assessing the risk of rabies, managing exposures, and when rabies testing of cats and other animals should be considered, please refer to the [BCCDC Communicable Disease Manual](#) and the [BC Rabies Guidance for Veterinarians](#).

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the CFIA for their role in rabies testing and data management. We also acknowledge the role of veterinarians and BC veterinary practices, the BCCDC Public Health Veterinarian, Medical Health Officers, Office of the Chief Veterinarian, the Animal Health Centre of the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food, BC Ministry of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship, BC's community bat program, BC wildlife rehabilitation centres, the Office of the Provincial Health Officer, the regional health authorities, and the public in reporting and controlling rabies across the province.

We acknowledge the Title and Rights of BC First Nations who have cared for and nurtured the lands, air and waters for all time, including the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sḵwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation), and sə́lílwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh Nation) on whose unceded, occupied, and ancestral territory BCCDC is located. As a provincial organization, we also recognize and acknowledge the inherent Title and Rights of BC First Nations whose territories stretch to every inch of the lands colonially known as "British Columbia". Information on the work BCCDC is doing to eradicate Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination is available on the [BCCDC website](#).

References

Brigham, M. (2021). *Bats of British Columbia*. E-Fauna BC: Electronic Atlas of the Fauna of British Columbia. <https://ibis.geog.ubc.ca/biodiversity/efauna/BatsofBritishColumbia.html>