

DPHHS HAN

Information Sheet



DATE

September 14, 2026

SUBJECT

Nationwide Increase in Reported Human Rabies Exposures: Rabies Post-exposure Prophylaxis Administration

CDC HAN SUMMARY

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued a Health Alert Network (HAN) Health Advisory in response to recent reports of increases in human exposures to rabid or possibly rabid animals and rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) administration errors. Since July 2026, multiple United States jurisdictions have reported local increases in human rabies exposures involving known rabies vectors or animals in which rabies is less commonly reported. Several high-profile rabies outbreaks and mass rabies exposure events have highlighted the importance of performing careful rabies risk assessments and following evidence-based recommendations for administering PEP. Health departments can help clinicians who provide rabies vaccination in their jurisdictions stay aware of the importance of rabies risk assessments before administering PEP. Clinicians and healthcare facilities can ensure that PEP is administered only when appropriate and that human rabies immune globulin (HRIG) and rabies vaccines are administered according to Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommendations.

BACKGROUND

Rabies is a viral illness that is almost universally fatal, however it can be prevented when post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is given in a timely manner. Montana DPHHS tracks rabies-positive animals, rabies cases in humans, and recommendations for or administration of rabies PEP to humans.

The Montana Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (MVDL) tests for a number of conditions in animals, including rabies. Animals submitted for rabies testing come from throughout Montana, with potential rabies exposure to humans (or animals) after exposure to the mammal. This year, MVDL has tested 554 animals for rabies, exceeding the usual number submitted.

On average, approximately 200 individuals in Montana are recommended to receive rabies PEP each year. However, in 2025 and 2026, the number of people recommended for rabies PEP has increased. So far in 2026, DPHHS has recorded 356 individuals for whom rabies PEP was administered or recommended. In 2026, 13 animals, all bats, tested positive for rabies at MVDL, which is within average. Bats are the animal most often infected with rabies in Montana. Of 70 animals testing positive for rabies in Montana since 2023, 67 (96%) were bats, 2 (3%) were skunks, and 1 (1%) cattle.

Montana uses a 3-step rabies management system: Observe, Test, PEP.

- 1) **Observe** the animal if appropriate. This applies to domestic dogs, cats, and ferrets only.
- 2) **Test** the animal if it fails observation or observation is not appropriate.

- 3) Recommend **PEP** for humans and animals exposed if the test result is positive or unsuitable. This is also for when the animal is not available for testing and it is assumed positive.

INFORMATION

See CDC HAN 00533

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Clinicians

- Verbally confirm with a patient if they have had a previous rabies PEP or pre-exposure vaccine series prior to administering their PEP series.
- Confer with your [local or tribal public health department](#) with questions about rabies PEP series or other animal bite situations.
- Report all animal bites to local and tribal public health through the usual channels.

Recommendations for Health Departments

- Consult with Communicable Disease Epidemiology (CDEpi) for unusual situations or deviations from ACIP recommendations (406-444-0273).
- Continue to report all rabies PEP into MIDIS system within 7 days.

Recommendation for the Public

- All animal bites should be treated by a medical provider to assess for wound management, tetanus vaccination status, and infectious disease risk (including rabies).
- Keep your animals up to date on rabies vaccinations.
- Avoid encounters with animals, especially wild or sick looking ones.
- If you are bitten by an animal, try to capture it if it is safe to do so. Contact your local veterinarian and health department for next steps (observation or testing).
- If a bat is found deceased in the house, it can be submitted to the MVDL using their portal. <https://liv.mt.gov/Diagnostic-Lab/index>

CDC HAN FULL REPORT

Please use the following link to access the full CDC HAN:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/han/php/notices/han00533.html>