

Animal Bites and Rabies in Alameda County, 2019 – 2023

Background

Rabies is a neurological disease caused by the rabies virus. The virus causes Acute Viral Encephalomyelitis and is always fatal to humans unless post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is given before symptom onset. Humans can acquire rabies when exposed to the saliva of a rabid animal through a bite, scratch, or contact with mucous membranes. In the United States, more than 90% of animal rabies cases occur in wildlife.

Reporting animal bites is mandatory in Alameda County. Bites from both wild and domestic animals potentially expose a resident to the virus that causes rabies. By reporting these bites, Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD) can determine the risk of rabies exposure, recommend PEP, and coordinate animal testing with county animal and vector control.

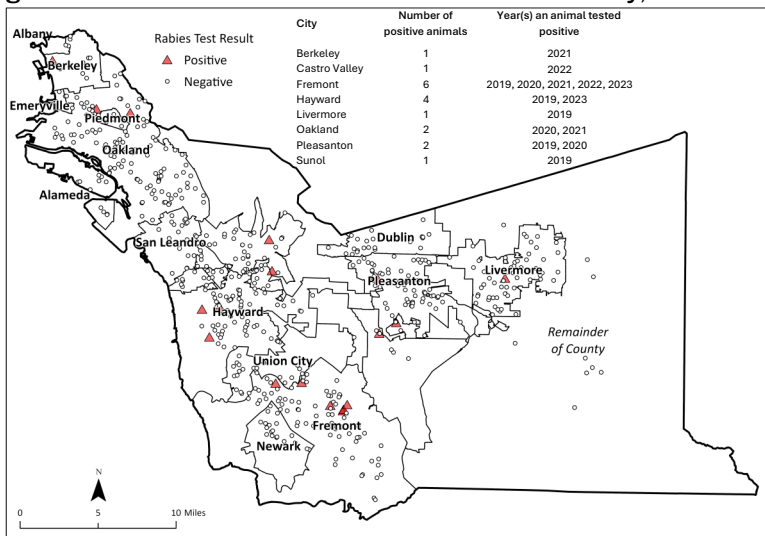
Table 1. Animal Bites and Rabies Testing, by Animal, 2019-2023

Animal	Number of bites reported	Number Tested**	Positive for Rabies
Bat	12	287	18 (6.3%)
Cat	203	165	0 (0%)
Dog	410	104	0 (0%)
Coyote	1	1	0 (0%)
Fox	1	10	0 (0%)
Opossum	4	25	0 (0%)
Raccoon	8	29	0 (0%)
Skunk	4	96	0 (0%)
Squirrel	5	9	0 (0%)
Other*	12	0	

*Other includes: Rat (2), monkey (2), llama (1), snake (1), and unknown (6)

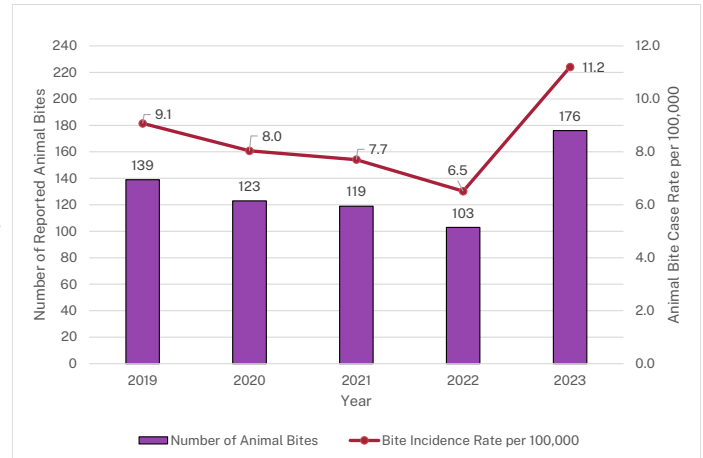
**More animals may be tested than bites reported due to uncertainty of exposure, pet exposure, or surveillance testing

Figure 2. Animals Tested for Rabies in Alameda County, 2019-2023



Source: ACPHD DCDCP, with data from Alameda County Environmental Health

Figure 1. Number of Reported Animal Bites by Year



Data Summary

From 2019 – 2023, 660 animal bites were reported to ACPHD. Most bites were from cats and dogs. Only bats tested positive for rabies (6.3%, Table 1).

The number of bites by year decreased from 2019 – 2022, and increased in 2023 (Figure 1). Rabies has been found in all parts of Alameda County (Figure 2).

Provider Recommendations:

- Promptly [report](#) animal bites to ACPHD
- Encourage the bite victim to contact Vector Control and their local animal services to coordinate isolation or rabies testing of the biting animal if the animal is available
- When determining whether to administer [PEP](#), providers should consider the following:
 - Type of animal
 - Availability of animal for testing or isolation
 - Provoked vs unprovoked bite
 - Wound care provided to bite
- Call ACPHD if consultation is needed regarding PEP
- If recommended, PEP should start as soon as possible after exposure
- ACPHD does not offer vaccines, refer to ED if necessary