TEXAS Health and Human Services | Texas Department of State Health Services

Rabies in Animals, Texas: 2025

By Texas Department of State Health Services Zoonosis Control Branch Staff

Purpose

This annual report provides clinical and epidemiological backgrounds on rabies, presents current and historical case data for rabies testing in Texas, and describes preventive measures implemented by the Texas Department of State Health Services for rabies containment.

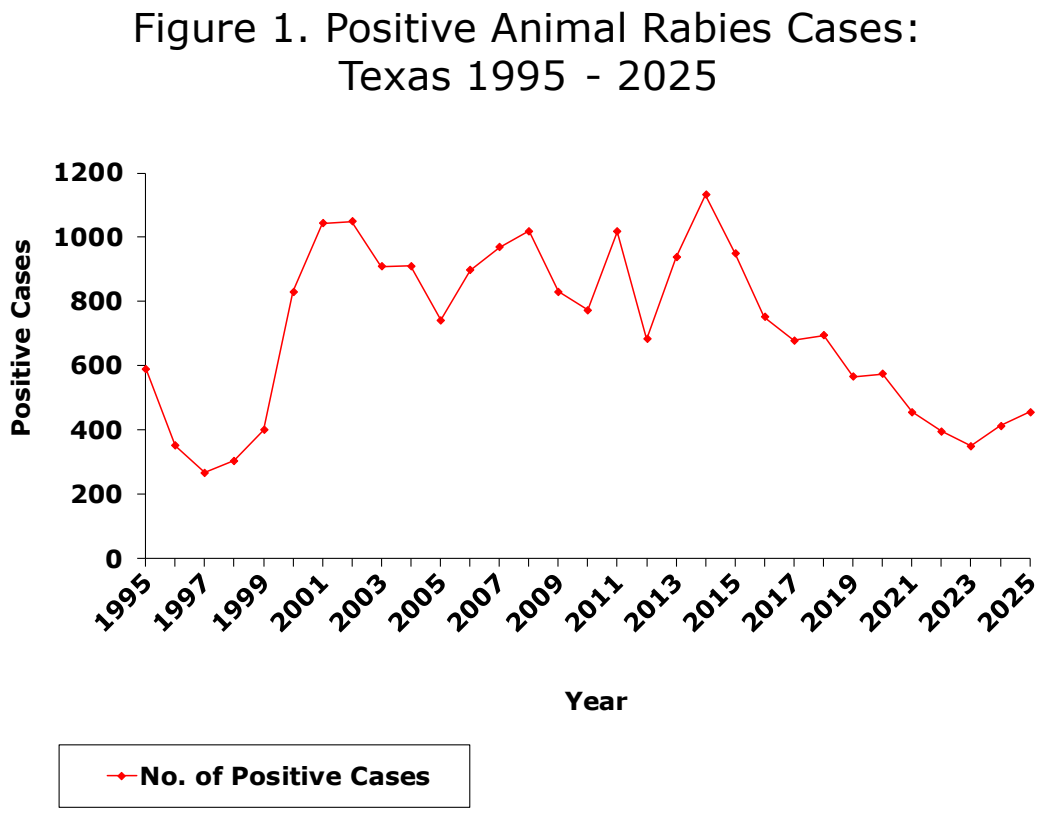
Background Summary

Zoonoses are diseases transmitted between animals and people. Rabies is a zoonotic disease in which the rabies virus infects the central nervous system of warm-blooded animals and almost universally results in death if postexposure prophylaxis (rabies biologicals) is not prescribed by a physician and administered with urgency. Transmission occurs when saliva containing the rabies virus is introduced into an opening in the skin, usually via the bite (or less likely a scratch) of a rabid animal. Though rare, exposure can also occur through infected saliva contacting mucous membranes. As defined in Texas law, high-risk animals for rabies include bats, skunks, foxes, raccoons, and coyotes. Bats and skunks are the primary reservoirs (hosts) for specific rabies virus variants (types) in Texas. Rabies infection in a species other than the reservoir species for the variant is considered "spillover." An example of spillover would be a cat infected with a skunk variant of rabies virus.

Case Analysis

In 2025, 456 (4%) of 10,470 animal specimens in Texas that were tested were positive for rabies (this report refers only to specimens confirmed as positive or negative). This was an 11% increase in cases from the 412 cases confirmed in 2024. In 2025, there were 44 positive rabies cases per 1,000 specimens tested, which was up from 41 positive rabies cases per 1,000 specimens tested in 2024. The reason for yearly fluctuations in statewide rabies cases is difficult to assess. There are a variety of variables that can affect trends for the number of laboratory-confirmed rabid animals, such as movement and population density of animals (the higher the population density, the higher the possibility of transmission of rabies between animals) or an increase in awareness to submit animals for testing due to an increase in public announcements on a human rabies case or an encounter of a person or domestic animal with an animal confirmed to have rabies. Yearly totals for 1995 through 2025 are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

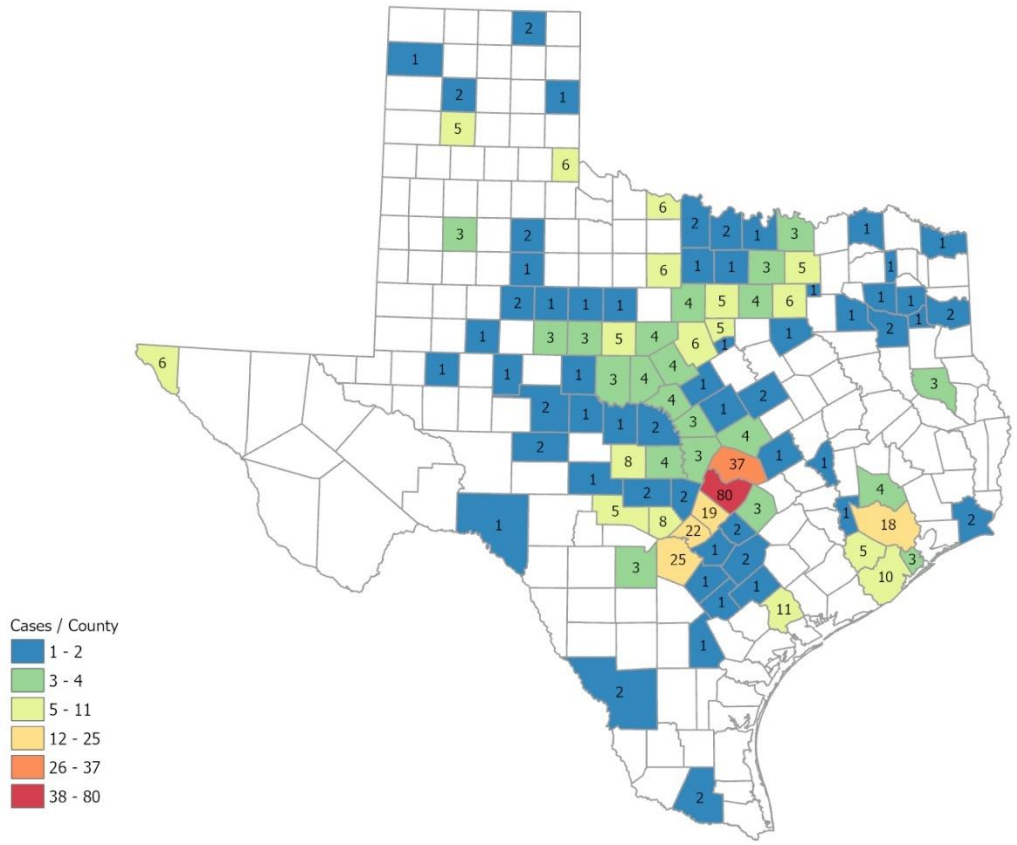


Discussion

During 2025, the highest monthly number of laboratory-confirmed rabies cases (65) occurred in September with bats (48) being the predominant rabid species. April and May were tied for the second highest number (56 each) of reported cases (the predominate species being 24 bats and 24 skunks in April; 26 bats in May). For 2024, April and October had the highest number of reported cases (52) with skunks (26) being the predominant rabid species reported in April and bats (33) being the predominant rabid species reported in October.

Cases of rabies in 2025 were confirmed in 100 of the 254 Texas counties as shown in Figure 2 compared with 95 counties with reported cases in 2024. Travis County had the highest number of reported rabies cases statewide with 80 cases (all bats) in 2025; Williamson County had the second highest number of cases with 37 (32 of which were bats). In 2024, Travis County also had the highest number of reported cases with 68 (63 of which were bats), and Williamson County had the second highest with 40 (35 of which were bats).

Figure 2. Confirmed Cases of Animal Rabies (all species) by County, 2025



Rabies in wildlife accounted for 414 (91%) of the confirmed cases throughout Texas in 2025; in 2024, rabies in wildlife accounted for 388 (94%) of the confirmed cases (refer to Table 1).

Table 1. Confirmed Cases of Rabies in Wild Animals: Texas 2024 and 2025

	2024	2025
Bat	205	226
Bobcat	0	1
Coyote	1	0
Fox	35	47
Raccoon	11	22

Skunk	136	118
Total	**388**	**414**

Bats were the primary source of positive cases reported in 2025 (50% of all positive cases). During 2025, 226 bats were confirmed positive for rabies compared with 205 (50% of all positive cases) in 2024. Of all bats tested for rabies, 15% were positive in 2025 and 12% were positive in 2024. Rabies in bats is enzootic (endemic in animals) in Texas; there are numerous bat variants of the rabies virus throughout the state.

During 2025, skunks had the second highest number of confirmed rabies cases with 118 (26% of all positive cases) compared with 136 (33% of all positive cases) in 2024. Of all skunks tested for rabies, 38% were positive in 2025 and 31% were positive in 2024. South-central skunk (SCS) remains an established variant of the rabies virus in Texas; there is notable spillover of this variant into other terrestrial species.

Rabid domestic animals continue to be a concern because they are more likely to have contact with humans than rabid wildlife. In 2025, there were 42 reported rabies cases in domestic animals (9% of all positive cases); of these rabies cases, 19 were cats and 5 were dogs. In 2024, there were 24 reported rabies cases in domestic animals (6% of all positive cases); of these rabies cases, 15 were cats and 5 were dogs (refer to Table 2). Rabies vaccination of dogs and cats is required by state law in Texas; vaccination is also recommended for ferrets, wolf-dog hybrids, and livestock (vaccination is strongly advised for equines and other livestock that have frequent contact with people).

Table 2. Confirmed Cases of Rabies in Domestic Animals: Texas 2024 and 2025

	2024	**2025**
Bovine	3	9
Caprine	0	3
Cat	15	19
Dog	5	5
Equine	1	6

Total	**24**	**42**

Oral Rabies Vaccination Program

A canine rabies epizootic (an epidemic in animals) began in 1988 and ultimately involved 21 counties in South Texas. Statewide there were no reported cases with the domestic dog/coyote (DDC) variant of the rabies virus in 2025. The last reported case with the DDC rabies virus variant was in March 2004.

Similarly, a Texas gray fox rabies epizootic began in 1988, and it eventually involved 53 counties in West-Central Texas. Statewide there were no reported cases with the Texas fox (TF) variant of the rabies virus in 2025. The last reported case with the TF rabies virus variant was in a bovine in May 2013; previous to this case, the last reported case was in May 2009.

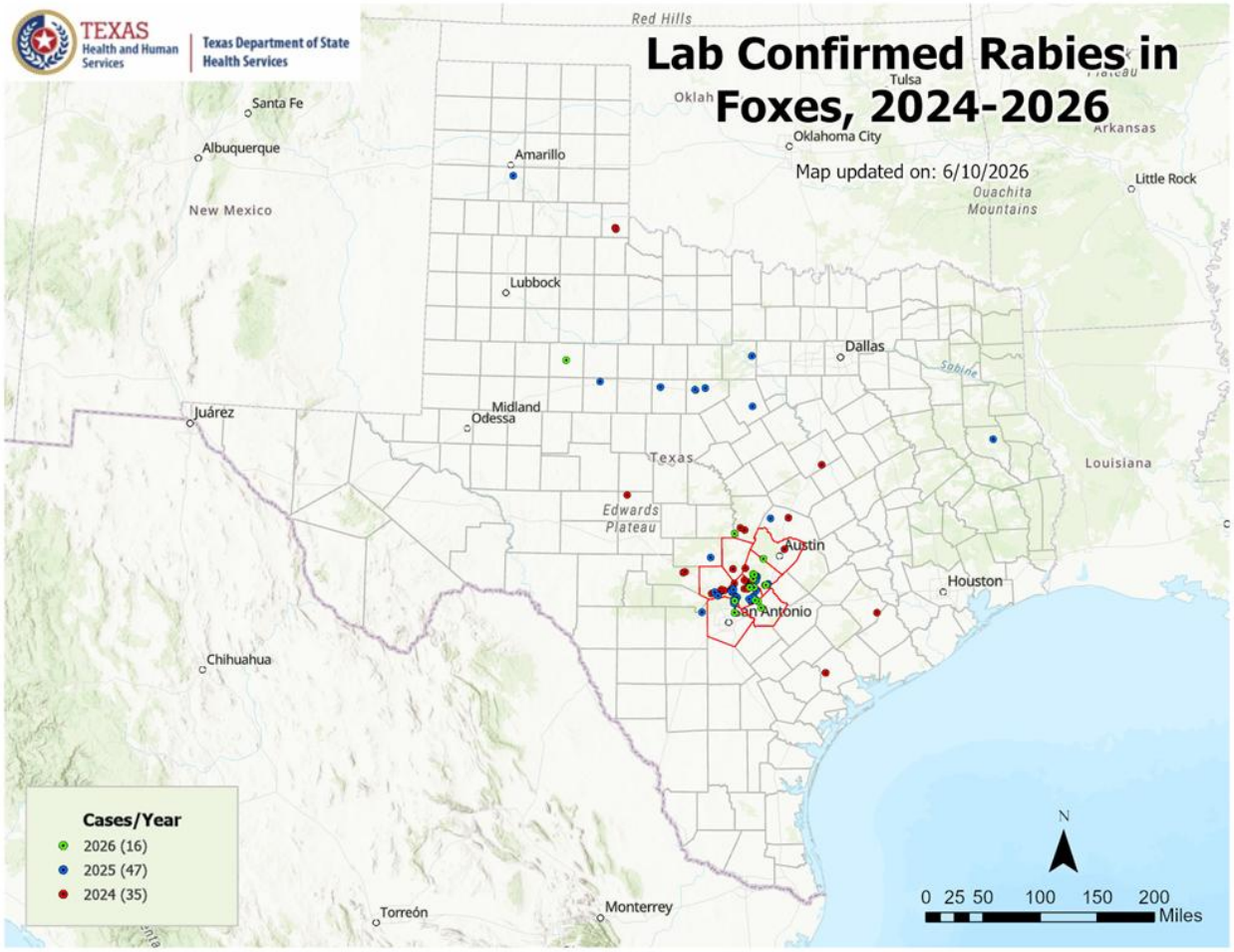
To control the canine and gray fox rabies epizootics, the Texas Department of State Health Services initiated the Oral Rabies Vaccination Program (ORVP) for coyotes in South Texas in February 1995 and for gray foxes in West-Central Texas in January 1996. The goals of the ORVP were to create zones of vaccinated coyotes and gray foxes across the epizootic areas or, at a minimum, along the leading edges of the areas where these rabies variants were detected in order to halt the geographic spread of those variants and eventually eliminate the epizootics. Immunization was accomplished by aerial distribution of edible baits containing oral rabies vaccine. The programs have continued annually and are now combined into a maintenance zone along the Texas-Mexico border targeting reservoir species for the DDC and TF variants of the rabies virus, those being coyotes and gray foxes, respectively. With the elimination of the DDC and TF variants from Texas, the ORVP now serves as an ongoing barrier to prevent reintroduction from Mexico.

The DSHS Zoonosis Control Branch (ZCB) has monitored a significant increase in rabies detections in foxes in Central Texas for several years. The affected area involves Hays, Comal, Guadalupe, Kendall, Bexar, Blanco, and Travis counties, with Hays and Comal counties reporting the highest concentration of recent rabies activity in foxes (refer to Figure 3). For the years 2024-2026 (as of 6/10/26), rabid foxes from this 7-county area accounted for:

- 2024: 62.9% of the rabid foxes reported statewide (22 out of 35)
- 2025: 76.6% of the rabid foxes reported statewide (36 out of 47)
- 2026 (through 6/10/26): 87.5% of the rabid foxes reported statewide (14 out of 16)

ZCB has worked with CDC to better understand the epidemiologic and genetic basis of the outbreak. Recent genetic testing supports the conclusion that there are two concurrent fox rabies outbreaks involving variations of the South-Central Skunk (SCS) rabies variant, with both outbreaks having evidence of fox-to-fox transmission. One outbreak, involving a smaller number of cases and centered in southern Hays and norther Bexar counites, may represent an early host-shift event among foxes.

Figure 3.



Conclusion

Rabies in Texas is enzootic in wildlife with bats and skunks typically being the primary sources of positive cases. A yearly increase in the number of reported cases, which can be caused by multiple variables, is not necessarily indicative that rabies cases are perpetually escalating. Rabies is a disease of significant public health concern because it can be transmitted between animals and people. Education and awareness of the existence of rabies and how it is transmitted is paramount as it is nearly 100% fatal if administration of postexposure prophylaxis is not achieved in an urgent manner. State law requires vaccination against rabies for dogs and cats and recommends it for ferrets, wolf-dog hybrids, and livestock. The ORVP, which has coyotes and gray foxes as its target species, has successfully eliminated the DDC and TF rabies virus variants in Texas and continues to serve as a barrier for their reestablishment in the state. An ongoing outbreak of rabies among foxes in a portion of central Texas may represent the emergence of a fox-associated rabies variant in this area.