

The Rabies Reporter

The Ministry of Northern Development, Mines,
Natural Resources and Forestry
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The Rabies Reporter is a scientific newsletter about current issues in rabies research and control. It is a joint effort of the Wildlife Research and Monitoring Section of the Ontario Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry; the Rabies Laboratory at the Ottawa Laboratory (Fallowfield) of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency; and the Ontario Ministry of Health. Articles for future issues will be welcomed by the editor. The Rabies Reporter is not peer reviewed and should be cited as a newsletter. Send contributions, letters and inquiries to: rabies@ontario.ca.

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[Ontario.ca/rabies](https://ontario.ca/rabies)

Rabies program demonstrates continued success

Anne McCarthy, Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry

Only four cases of raccoon strain rabies were detected in Ontario in the first half of 2021 (Figure 1). While only a slight increase from last year (2), low case numbers indicate continued success controlling the raccoon rabies outbreak in southern Ontario.

Using a similar level of surveillance, the total number of rabies cases (all strains) detected from January — June was fewer than previous years with only 11 rabies cases (4 raccoon strain, 7 bat strain) detected — down from 18 during the same time last year.

Raccoon strain: Between January and June, only four cases of mid-Atlantic raccoon strain rabies were detected; all were in skunks in Niagara Region. During the same period last year there were two cases detected in skunks, both in Hamilton.

Fox strain: No fox strain cases were detected during the first half of this year. We will continue monitoring and testing dead, sick or strange acting animals within the enhanced surveillance area, which includes the previous fox rabies control area. The last case of fox strain rabies was diagnosed in December 2018.

Bat strain: There were 7 bats detected with rabies from January to June 2021 across Ontario, including: Dundas (1), Hamilton (1), Lambton (1), Ottawa-Carleton (2), Perth (1) and Renfrew (1). All were big brown bat strain. Last year at this time, seven bats tested positive for rabies.

Between December 2015 and the end of June 2021, 485 raccoon strain and 21 fox strain cases have been detected in Ontario (Figure 2); only 23 of those have occurred in the past two years. Rabies control operations and enhanced surveillance are done within 50km of confirmed cases for a period of at least two years. As of July 2021, 483 cases from 2015 to early 2019 are now considered expired (greater than 2 years old). This means that the active control zone will shrink by about half (approximately 11,000 km²) for 2021 operations. The Ministry will continue enhanced surveillance across the complete outbreak area (2015-current) throughout 2021.

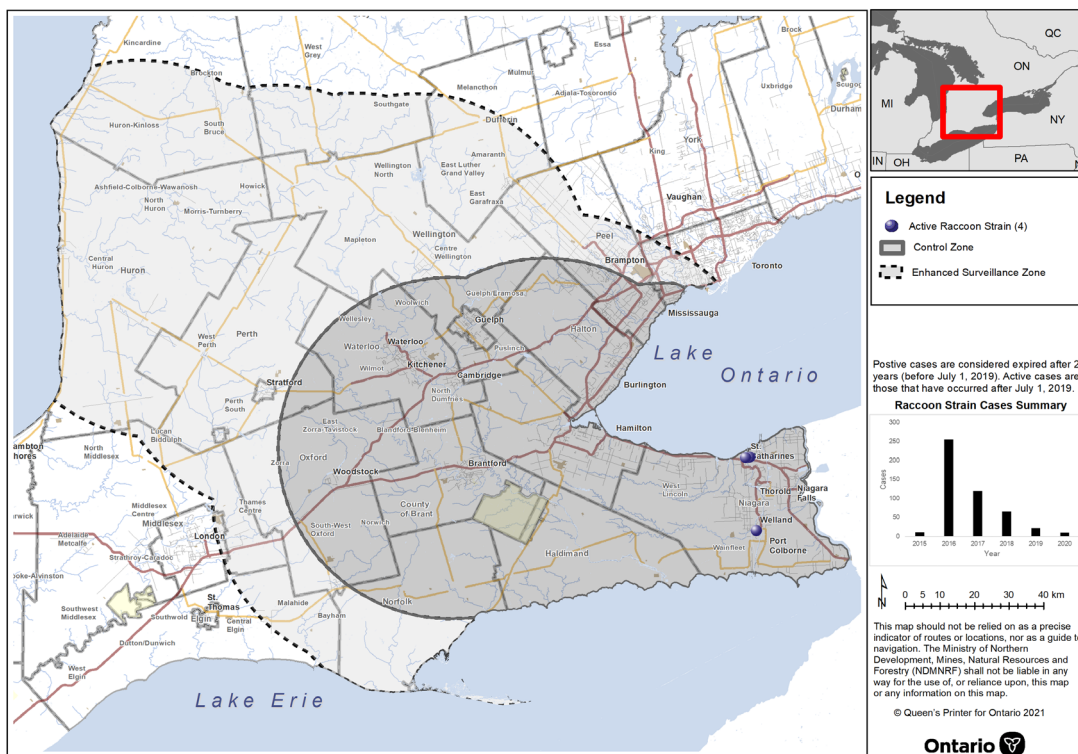


Figure 1. Terrestrial rabies cases (N=4) detected in southern Ontario from January–June 2021.

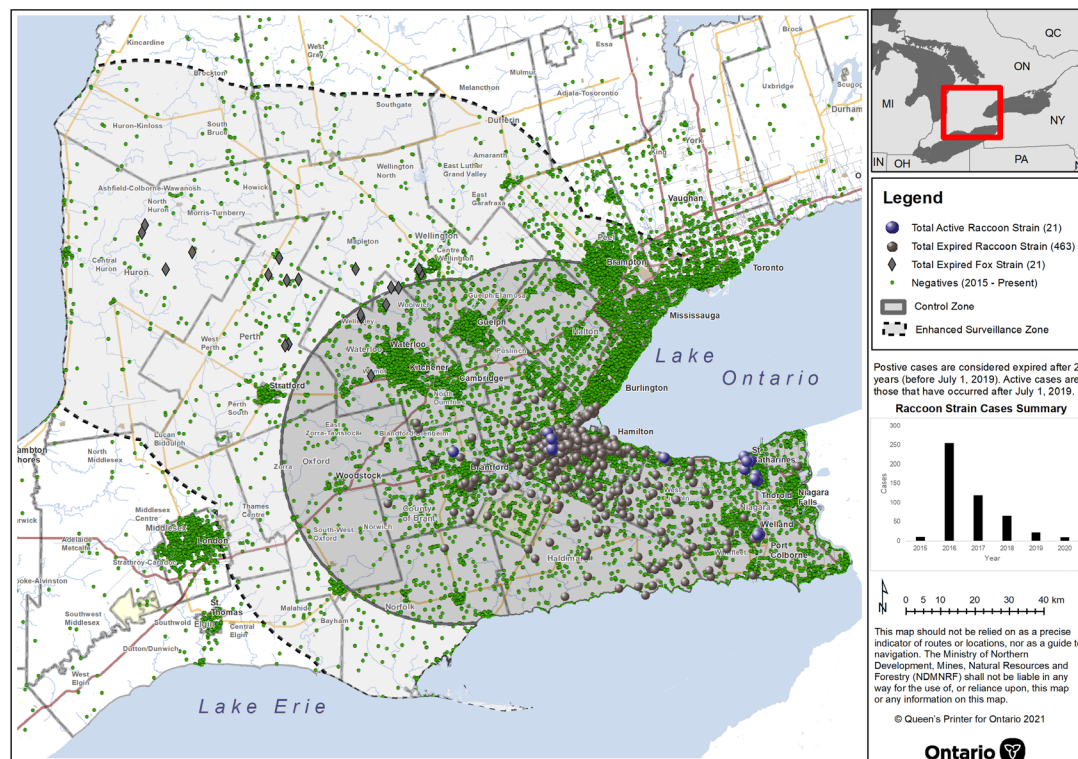


Figure 2. All terrestrial rabies cases active and expired (>2 years) detected in southern Ontario from December 2015–June 2021 along with the current surveillance and control zone.

OMAFRA Update on Rabies Response in Ontario

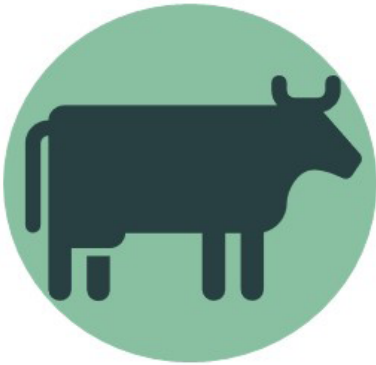
Maureen Anderson, Lead Veterinarian Animal Health & Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

Veterinarians should always be the first point of contact for animal owners with concerns about their animals' health, including potential rabies exposures. Sometimes, public health, animal control staff or wildlife rehabilitators may be the first point of contact for cases of potential rabies exposure in domestic animals. Owners of a potential exposed domestic animal should always be referred to their / a local veterinarian first for an initial risk assessment. Animal owners should never be advised to contact the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) directly, either online or by phone, regarding rabies exposure incidents involving their animals; if they do, owners will be redirected to contact their local veterinarian.

Veterinarians are welcome to contact OMAFRA for assistance with risk assessments, sample submission or post-exposure management, as needed. As of April 19, 2021, OMAFRA has launched an online portal where veterinarians can submit a request for assistance online at <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/rabiesrequest>. Requests submitted within business hours will receive a response the same day, typically within 1-2 hours. Requests submitted outside of business hours will receive a response the next business day; interim triage guidance is provided on the webpage. If assistance is required with completing the online form due to limited internet access or due to any other accessibility issue, veterinarians can contact the OMAFRA Agricultural Information Contact Centre at 1-877-424-1300 (option 1) during business hours (weekdays 8:30 AM – 4:30 PM). Occasionally, public health, animal control staff or wildlife rehabilitators may encounter a case in which there is concern that the domestic animal owner will not contact a local veterinarian (for whatever reason), but there is significant risk of exposure from a high-risk animal (e.g. direct contact with a bat, wounds inflicted by an abnormal terrestrial animal). Under these circumstances, public health, animal control staff or wildlife rehabilitators may submit a request for follow up using the same online form as veterinarians.

The OMAFRA rabies website includes detailed information for both animal owners and veterinarians about rabies response in Ontario. Veterinarians can access additional resources through the Ontario Animal Health Network on the Rabies Resource page (login required).

Veterinarians need to remain vigilant for cases of domestic animal exposure to potentially rabid animals. There continues to be a risk of incursion of fox rabies from northern regions of the province and of raccoon rabies from New York State. Contact with rabid bats is a risk in all regions. The best protection against rabies for both domestic animals and people is to avoid contact with potentially rabid wildlife and to keep domestic animals up-to-date on rabies vaccination. Rabies vaccination for dogs, cats and ferrets is a regulatory requirement in all health units in the province as of July 2018. Rabies vaccination is also required for horses, cattle and sheep that have contact with members of the general public and should be considered for any livestock in high-risk areas. If you suspect a domestic animal may have recently been exposed to a potentially rabid animal, it should be vaccinated (or revaccinated) as soon as possible if it is not possible to have the offending animal tested, regardless of the pet's vaccination status at the time.



Are you a Veterinarian?

- **You are the first point of contact** for owners concerning rabies exposures in domestic animals.
- Stay vigilant! **Rabies remains a risk**
 - from **bats** throughout Ontario, as well as **raccoons, skunks, foxes** and other mammals in some areas
 - from **migration or translocation** of rabid animals from the north (fox strain), south (raccoon strain), as well as imported dogs (canine strain).
- **Dogs, cats and some livestock must be vaccinated for rabies under the law:** Ontario Health Protection and Promotion Act (R.R.O 1990, Reg. 567)
- OMAFRA has a [new online form](#) for **veterinarians to request assistance** with potential rabies exposure cases.

Figure 3. Guidance for veterinarians in Ontario.

Additional information:

OMAFRA Rabies in Ontario website: www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/food/inspection/ahw/rabies.htm

Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry Rabies website: www.ontario.ca/page/rabies

Ontario Health Protection and Promotion Act (R.R.O 1990) regulations:

Communicable diseases - General (Reg. 557): www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/900557

Rabies immunization (Reg. 567): www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/900567

Animal type Year	Fox 2020	Fox 2021	RAC 2020	RAC 2021	SSK 2020	SSK 2021	Other 2020	Other 2021	Bat 2020	Bat 2021	Dog 2020	Dog 2021	Cat 2020	Cat 2021	LVSTK 2020	LVSTK 2021	Total 2020	Total 2021
Southern Ontario																		
Brant																	0	0
Elgin																	0	0
Essex																	0	0
Haldimand																	0	0
Hamilton					2					1							2	1
Kent									1								1	0
Lambton										1							0	1
Middlesex																	0	0
Niagara						4											0	4
Norfolk																	0	0
Oxford																	0	0
Northern Ontario																		
Algoma																	0	0
Cochrane																	0	0
Kenora																	0	0
Muskoka																	0	0
Nipissing																	0	0
Parry Sound																	0	0
Rainy River																	0	0
Sudbury																	0	0
Thunder Bay																	0	0
Timiskaming																	0	0
Regional Totals																		
Eastern	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	4
Central	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Western	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	1
Southern	0	0	0	0	2	4	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	6
Northern	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	0	0	0	0	2	4	0	0	16	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	11

Acronym Legend

RAC: raccoon

SSK: striped skunk

Other: other wildlife

LVSTK: livestock

