

# Rabies Testing

The Bureau of Public Health Laboratories (BPHL), which is the sole provider of rabies testing in Florida, performs rabies testing on animals suspected of carrying the disease. Human rabies is rare but fatal disease caused by exposure to an infected wild or domestic animal. Since canine rabies vaccination programs were implemented in the early 1950s, the number of rabies cases in domestic animals has declined significantly. However, as rabies infection in dogs declined, the number of cases in wild animals increased. In Florida, rabies is now found predominately in bats and raccoons. Rabies virus is transmitted through a bite, scratch, or saliva introduction into open wounds from an infected animal. If an individual is exposed to a rabid animal, treatment can prevent the progression to disease. Rabies prophylactic treatment is costly and must be administered soon after exposure to be effective. Laboratory results are used by health care providers to determine whether or not treatment is needed.



## Highlights/specialties

- State labs perform the CDC standard protocol for rabies diagnosis by DFA on approximately 2200 animals per year.
- In the last 10 years over 900 animals tested positive for rabies in Florida.
- All positive results are reported immediately to the local county health department and the Bureau of Epidemiology.
- Most rabies positive results in Florida are found in raccoons, foxes, bats, otters, bobcats, skunks and domestic cats.
- Testing is routinely performed weekdays and on Saturday for specimens meeting high priority testing criteria.
- Labs provide consultative services to county health department and environmental health personnel to assist in determining when testing is needed.
- Perform speciation of bats submitted for rabies testing to track which species are the primary reservoir for rabies in Florida.



**Contributing to a Healthier Florida  
One Test at a Time**