

The Iowa Department of Health and Human Services is alerting veterinarians and animal control officers to two notable 2026 rabies detections:

- (1) Lyon County: A cow tested positive for rabies, the first rabid cow in Iowa since 2018. Whole genome sequencing identified the North Central Skunk variant, indicating exposure to a rabid skunk.
- (2) Decatur County: A skunk tested positive, marking the first skunk detected with rabies south of Interstate 80 since 2012.

Skunks and bats are the primary rabies reservoirs in Iowa, with some bats testing positive yearly ([2024 Iowa Rabies Report](#)). Although detections in skunks are far lower than during the 1980s peak, recent detections underscore the need for veterinarians and animal control officials to continue preventing exposures and assessing risk.

Veterinarians should encourage clients to:

- Keep dogs, cats, and horses up-to-date on rabies vaccinations.
 - Remind horse owners that the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) classifies rabies vaccination as a [core vaccine](#).
- Consider vaccinating high-value livestock (show animals, breeding stock, etc.).

Anyone who sees a skunk behaving abnormally should consider rabies. Concerning signs include sudden daytime activity, loss of fear, unprovoked aggression, disorientation or staggering, and unusual vocalizations (skunks are usually quiet). If a skunk attacks a person or animal, it should be humanely euthanized without damaging the head and submitted for testing to guide appropriate follow-up. Skunks behaving normally should be left alone and observed from a distance.

Rabies is 100% fatal, and anyone with a potential exposure requires post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). An exposure includes any bite or scratch, or situations where direct contact with a bat or other possibly rabid animal cannot be ruled out (e.g., finding a bat in the room with a sleeping, intoxicated, or incapacitated person). Animals with possible rabies exposure should be evaluated by a veterinarian for booster vaccination and appropriate quarantine. The [Rabies Confinement Table](#) outlines recommended actions for different animal-to-animal exposure scenarios. Guidance on rabies post exposure-prophylaxis in people is available in the [Iowa HHS Rabies Epi Manual](#).

There are two laboratories in Iowa that test animals for rabies. Information on submitting specimens to each laboratory can be found here: [Rabies | Health & Human Services](#).

Iowa Code §351.38 requires anyone aware of an animal that bites or attacks a person, and any veterinarian or physician who identifies an animal known or suspected to be rabid, to report it to the local confinement authority. Local contacts are listed on the [Iowa HHS Rabies webpage](#) under “Animal Confinement” within the “[Veterinarians](#)” section.