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NEWS

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Canine Attack Surveillance in Texas
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CANINE ATTACK* SURVEILLANCE IN TEXAS JUNE 1987 - DECEMBER 1990

Canine attacks on humans are a significant public health problem. Each year, more than one million people are bitten by dogs in the United States. Since many attacks go unreported, some authorities estimate that the actual number may be two million or more per year.¹ Many of these attacks result in serious injuries; some are fatal. One study listed 157 dog-bite related deaths in the United States from 1979 through 1988.² During this period, the 17 deaths reported from Texas were the highest number reported by any state. In 1990, three human deaths were reported in Texas: an 18-month-old girl from Collin County, a 10-year-old boy from Ector County, and a 72-year-old woman from Brazos County. The animals involved were a pit bull, a Doberman pinscher, and a chow chow, respectively.

Since June 1967, the TDH Zoonosis Control Division (ZCD) has maintained surveillance of severe animal bites or attacks on humans. "Severe bite" is defined as a puncture or laceration made by an animal's teeth, which breaks the skin, resulting in a degree

of human trauma which would cause most prudent and reasonable people to seek medical care for treatment of the wound, without consideration of rabies prevention alone. A "severe attack" is one in which the animal repeatedly bites or vigorously shakes its victim, and the victim, or an intervening person, has extreme difficulty terminating the attack.³

By law, animal bites must be reported to local health authorities (Rabies Control Act, Chapter 826 of the Texas Health and Safety Code); reporting by local health authorities and animal control agencies to state authorities (ZCD) is voluntary. ZCD Severe Animal Bite or Attack forms are supplied to city or county agencies that participate in the surveillance program.

During the 43-month period from June 1987 to December 1990, the ZCD received 469 reports of attacks that met surveillance criteria; all involved dogs. Most were submitted by city or county animal control bite investigators, health departments, or law enforcement agencies. The reports were submitted from

83 of the 254 Texas counties.

Victims were attacked on the animal owner's property in 64% of the cases, and on the victim's property in 12%. Over 80% of the victims knew the owner of the biting animal as a neighbor (171, 37%), friend (72, 15%), relative (64, 14%), household member (57, 12%), or acquaintance (15, 3%). About 73% of the attacks were witnessed, at least in part, and the animal's owner was present in 40% of the attacks. In half of the attacks, the animal was restrained by a fence, leash, or chain, or was inside the owner's home.

The victim's age was reported in 458 of 469 attacks (Table 1). Ages ranged from 4 months to 86 years. Children under 10 years of age accounted for 49% of all attacks; yet suffered 73% (149/203) of all head injuries (odds ratio = 6.75, 95% confidence limits = 4.4, 10.4). In children under 10 years of age, there were more male victims (63%), than female (37%).

* For the purpose of this report, the word "attack" will also mean "severe bite."

Chow chows or chow cross-breeds were involved in 23% of all reported attacks. Pit bull and pit bull crossbreeds accounted for an additional 14% of the total (Table 2). Special studies of ownership and breeds are needed to estimate animal denominators.

PDN Editorial Note: Animals involved in attacks on humans are considered dangerous and must be properly restrained to avoid additional human injury or death. However, local authorities cannot declare an animal dangerous and require proper restraint if such attacks go unreported.

Under Texas law, "a person who knows of an animal bite or scratch to an individual that the person could reasonably foresee as capable of transmitting rabies, or who know of an animal that the person suspects is rabid, shall report the incident or animal to the local health authority of the county or municipality in which the person lives, in which the animal is located, or in which the exposure occurs" (Texas Health and Safety Code, Chapter 826, Subchapter E, Section 826.041).

For assistance on problems or questions about rabies prophylaxis, call your local health department, TDH public health regional office, or the TDH Epidemiology Division (512) 458-7328 (Tex-An 824-9328) during working hours or (512) 458-7111 on nights, weekends, and holidays.

Prepared by: Vic Whadford, Public Health Technician, Zoonosis Control Division, TDH.

References:

1. August JR. Dog and cat bites. J Am Vet Med Assn 1988; 193(11):1394-8.
2. Sacks JJ, Sattin RW, Bonzo SE. Dog bite-related fatalities from 1979 through 1988. J Am Med Assn 1989;262(11):1489-92.
3. Wright JC. Severe attacks by dogs: characteristics of the dogs, the victims, and the attack settings. Public Health Rep 1985;100(1):55-61.

Table 1.
Canine attacks on humans by age and sex -- Texas, June 1987 - December 1990

Age	Male	Female	Total
< 1	0	1	1
1-4	60	35	95
5-9	81	46	127
10-14	52	23	75
15-19	14	13	27
20-29	17	16	33
30-39	16	23	39
40-49	8	6	14
50-59	10	10	20
60+	15	12	27
Total	273	185	458

Table 2.
Canine breeds or types involved in attacks on humans -- Texas, June 1987 - December 1990

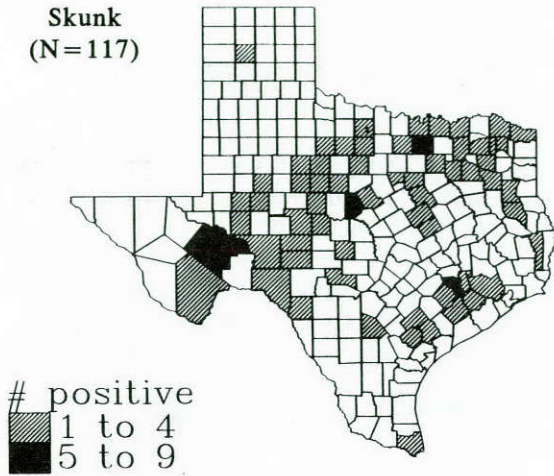
Breed or Type	Number		Total	% Total
	Purebred/Type	Crossbreeds		
Chow Chow	81	28	109	23
Pit Bull	43	21	64	14
German Shepherd	29	21	50	11
Labrador Retriever	15	17	32	7
Unknown/Crossbreeds	-	27	27	6
Cocker Spaniel	15	5	20	4
Rottweiler	17	3	20	4
Doberman Pinscher	17	2	19	4
All Others*	-	-	128	27
Total	227	124	469	100

* No other single breed or type comprised more than 1.5% of total.

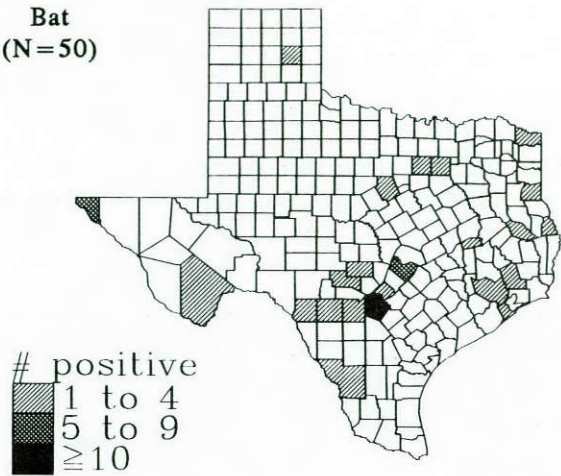


DISTRIBUTION OF LABORATORY-CONFIRMED RABIES CASES BY SPECIES -- TEXAS, 1990

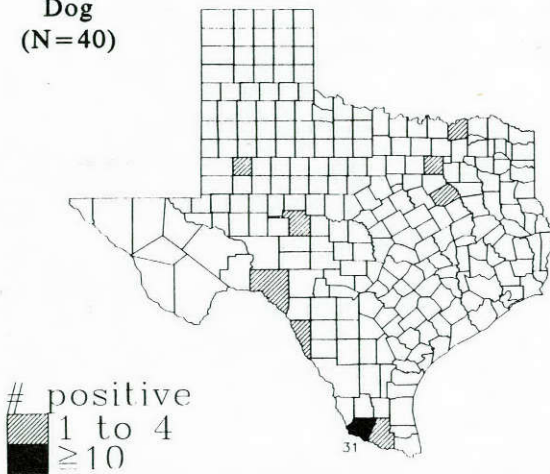
Skunk
(N=117)



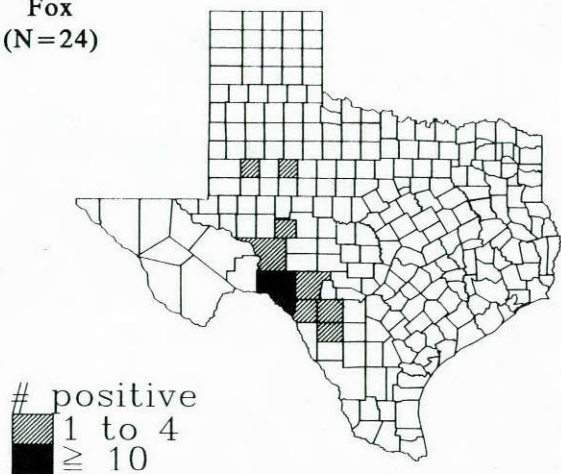
Bat
(N=50)



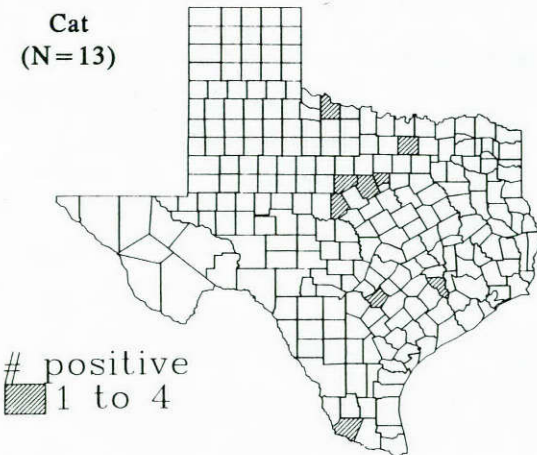
Dog
(N=40)



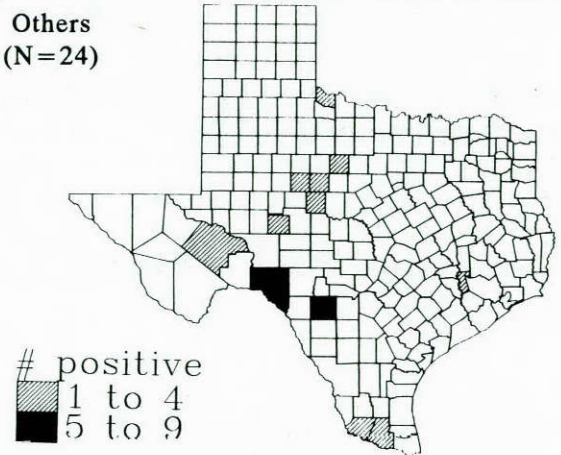
Fox
(N=24)



Cat
(N=13)



Others
(N=24)

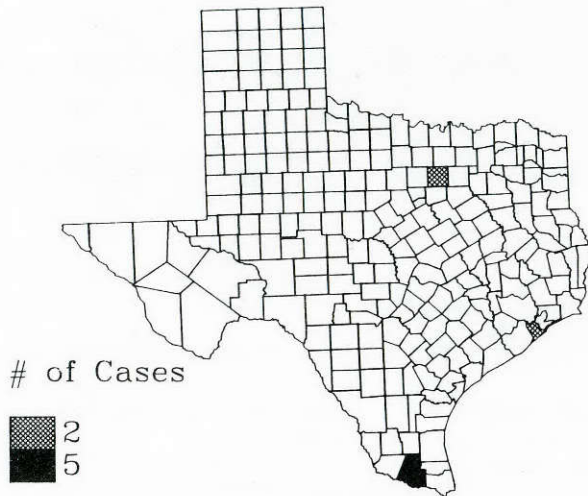


Hardeman	1 Bobcat, 1 Cow	Starr	3 Coyotes
Hidalgo	1 Human	Taylor	1 Horse
Irion	1 Cow	Uvalde	2 Bobcats, 1 Goat
Nolan	1 Horse	Val Verde	1 Cow, 1 Raccoon
Pecos	1 Bobcat, 1 Cow	Waller	2 Goats, 2 Horses
Runnels	1 Cow		1 Raccoon
Shackelford	1 Cow		1 Horse

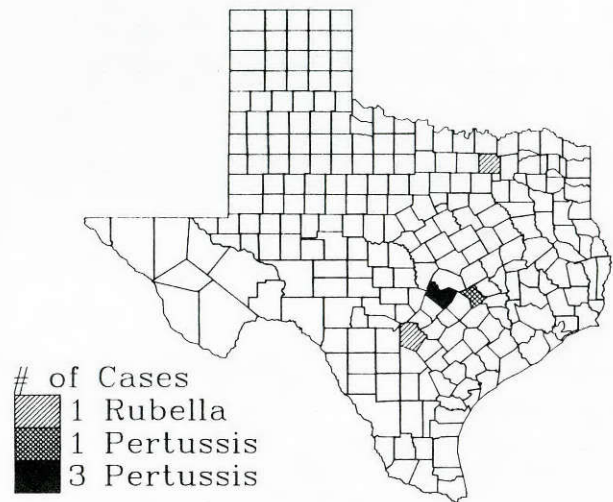
VACCINE-PREVENTABLE DISEASE UPDATE *

Suspected/Confirmed Cases Reported
 With Onsets (June 30-July 13, 1991)
 Weeks 27-28

Measles



Rubella & Pertussis



Summary Totals of Suspected/Confirmed Cases Reported YTD:

	Latest Onset Date	Total This Period	YTD Total
MEASLES	07/11/91	9	400
RUBELLA	07/04/91	2	79
PERTUSSIS	07/13/91	4	142

* Provisional Data

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