

news from Member Countries

Self-declaration

Other than for African horse sickness, bovine spongiform encephalopathy, classical swine fever, contagious bovine pleuropneumonia, foot and mouth disease and peste des petits ruminants, for which the OIE currently has a procedure of official recognition of status, the self-declaration of freedom of a country or a territory from a given OIE-listed disease is under the responsibility of the Member concerned. The OIE is not responsible for inaccuracies in the publication of self-declarations concerning the status of a country or zone with regard to a disease.

Self-declaration by Latvia of freedom from rabies

submitted to the OIE on 8 December 2014 by Dr Maris Balodis, Delegate of Latvia to the OIE, Director General, Chief Veterinary Officer, Food and Veterinary Service, Ministry of Agriculture, Riga

Notification of rabies

Rabies has been a notifiable disease in Latvia since 1929. According to the Veterinary Medicine Law, animal owners must immediately notify a veterinarian of any animal death, abortion, simultaneous disease in several animals, and any case that arouses suspicion that an animal may be affected by infectious disease.

Epidemiological evaluation

The first written evidence of rabies cases in Latvia dates back to 1822. Rabies has been endemic in Latvia since the 19th century. Before 1951, most rabies cases in Latvia were recorded in dogs, but after that more cases in wildlife, mainly red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) and wolves (*Canis lupus*), were confirmed annually. The first case in a raccoon dog (*Nyctereutes procyonoides*) was reported in 1958. Since 1963 the disease has become mainly sylvatic, and rabies mediated by foxes and raccoon dogs is now the main problem.

The number of rabies cases varied between 71 and 144 in red foxes and between 20 and 39 in raccoon dogs in the years from 1993 until 1999. These numbers increased in the year 2000, and they peaked in 2003 (471 cases in red foxes, 285 cases in raccoon dogs).

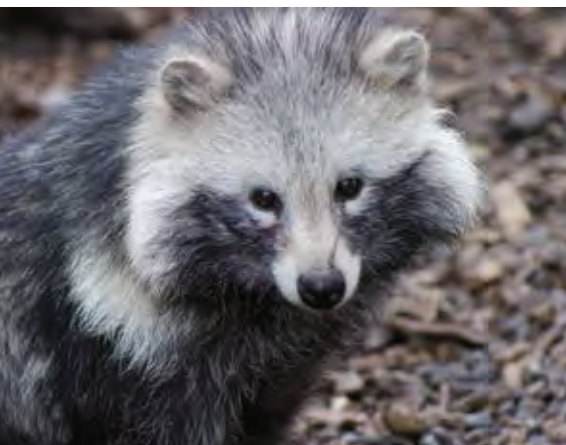
The last human rabies case in Latvia was reported in 2003.

As a result of the oral vaccination of wild animals (foxes and raccoon dogs) the number of rabies cases approximately halved: in 2007, 95 cases in red foxes and 33 cases in raccoon dogs were diagnosed. In 2008 and 2009, the number of rabies cases continued to decrease: 44 and 24 cases in red foxes and 41 and 24 cases in raccoon dogs were confirmed, respectively. In 2010, only 16 cases of rabies were detected, among which 11 cases occurred in red foxes and 1 in a raccoon dog.

The last case of rabies in wild animals in Latvia was detected in October 2010.

In 2011, there were no rabies cases detected in Latvia, but in 2012 three cases of rabies were confirmed: on 5 January in a horse, on 27 January in a dog and on 27 February in cattle – this was the last rabies case reported in Latvia.

The number of animals suspected of rabies and tested in the framework of a passive surveillance programme for rabies in Latvia in the period from 2000 to 2014 is shown in Figure 2.



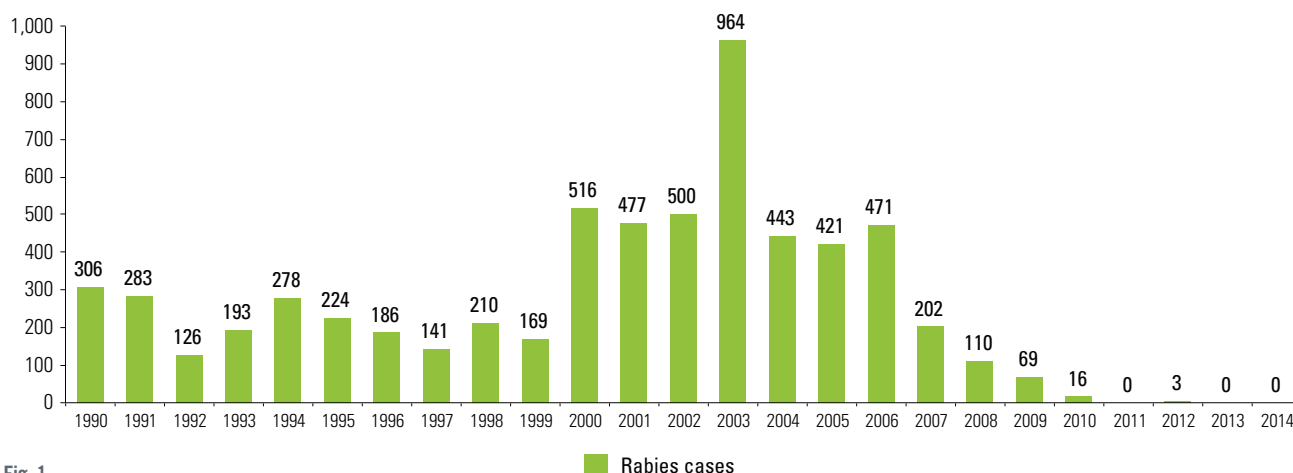


Fig. 1
Rabies cases in Latvia (January 1990 to September 2014)

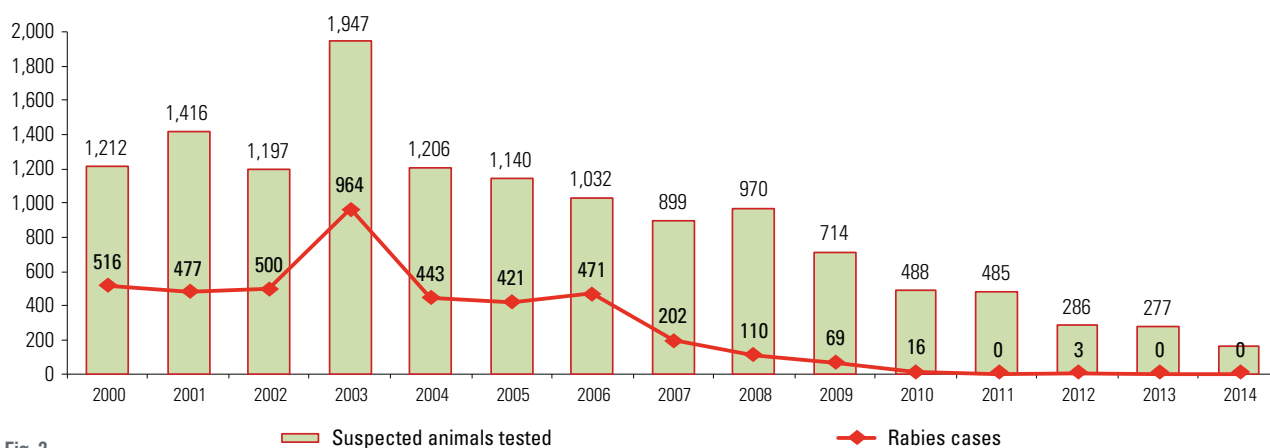


Fig. 2
Number of rabies tests and rabies cases confirmed (January 2000 to October 2014)

Eradication measures

Domestic animals

Compulsory annual vaccination of dogs, cats and domestic ferrets, as well as vaccination of agricultural animals in outbreak sites, was an appropriate method used to reduce the spread of the infection among domestic animals.

Wild animals

The first field trials of the vaccination of wildlife against rabies started in 1991. In certain territories oral vaccination was performed with a parenteral vaccine produced in Russia. Veterinarians injected the vaccine into appropriate baits (for instance, fish or chicken heads) and distributed them in the forests.

The second strategy for rabies eradication – oral vaccination using a manufactured rabies vaccine – was started in 1998. From that year, vaccine baits were manually distributed twice a year in parts of Latvia, in collaboration with hunters. From 2001 to

2003 the entire territory of Latvia was covered with vaccine baits. However, the surveillance results showed that manual distribution of vaccine baits was not efficient. During 2004, oral vaccination campaigns were not carried out because the new oral vaccination strategy was being elaborated.

The third strategy – oral vaccination against rabies using aerial distribution of vaccine baits – was initiated in 2005, when the vaccination campaigns were carried out in spring and autumn, covering the western part of the country. From 2006 to 2013, aerial distribution of vaccine baits was implemented over the whole territory of Latvia twice a year. An average of 1.6 million vaccine baits were distributed during each campaign, giving 3.2 million per year, and providing at least 23–25 baits per km². The Latvian rabies elimination programme has been co-financed by the European Commission since 2005.

Since 2012 the Latvian rabies control programme has also included oral vaccination of wildlife in the Belarus territory (a 70-km-wide buffer zone near the Latvian border covering

an area of 10,850 km²). The programme is co-financed by the European Commission; it is implemented by the Food and Veterinary Service of Belarus and supervised by the Food and Veterinary Service of Latvia. Activities are performed on the basis of bilateral agreement between the governments of the two countries.

In 2014, an oral vaccination campaign was carried out in the autumn in the buffer zones (70–100-km wide) with both Russia and Belarus. National budget is foreseen to be available for an emergency reaction in the case of deterioration of the epidemiological situation.

Surveillance and monitoring

The Food and Veterinary Service of Latvia performs rabies surveillance in Latvia, where rabies is a notifiable disease. Animal owners must immediately notify a veterinarian of animal death, abortion, simultaneous disease in several animals, and any case that arouses suspicion that animals are affected by an infectious disease (Veterinary Medicine Law).

All measures are carried out on the basis of the following documents:

- Regulation of Cabinet of Ministers No. 178 (23 February 2010): ‘Order of rabies eradication and control’;
- Food and Veterinary Service Instruction Order No. 51 (28 March 2011): ‘Programme on prophylaxis and eradication of rabies’.

Both documents describe measures to be taken in situations where a rabies case is suspected or confirmed.

Regarding oral vaccination of wildlife, an Animal Infectious Disease State Surveillance Programme, in which a chapter on oral rabies vaccination is included, is approved annually by the Chief Veterinary Officer. The programme defines the area in which vaccination should be carried out, the number of vaccine baits and the number of campaigns per year, as well as an evaluation of the efficiency of the vaccination campaigns.

All laboratory diagnostic tests for rabies are performed in an accredited laboratory at the Food Safety, Animal Health and Environment Research Institute ‘BIOR’, which is also a national reference laboratory for rabies in Latvia.

In order to evaluate the efficiency of the oral vaccination programme annually, four target animals (foxes and raccoon dogs) per 100 km² of the vaccinated territory are tested for the presence of the biomarker tetracycline (bait uptake) and the antibody level is measured (seroconversion).

Importation procedures

As a Member State of the European Union, Latvia follows importation procedures in line with the European Union legislation. The importation procedures are enacted by Regulation (EC) No. 998/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 May 2003 on the animal health requirements applicable to the non-commercial movement of pet animals, and amending Council Directive 92/65/EEC. Importation of susceptible pet animals is allowed if they have been vaccinated against rabies, and animals originating from defined countries with an unfavourable rabies situation additionally undergo laboratory testing to demonstrate the existence of a sufficient immune response.

Latvia complies with the requirement mentioned under point 5 of Article 8.12.3. of the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code*, i.e. that no imported case in the Orders Carnivora or Chiroptera has been confirmed in the country for the past six months.

Conclusion

Rabies is a notifiable disease in Latvia. A surveillance and eradication programme in wildlife and domestic animals is in place.

Preventive measures – compulsory vaccination of domestic animals, oral vaccination of wildlife and information campaigns – are in place.

During the past two years rabies cases have not been reported in Latvia.

Latvia complies with the conditions to be considered a rabies-free country in accordance with Article 8.12.3. of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* (2014).

Therefore, considering

- the aforementioned information,
 - the fact that more than two years have elapsed since the last case of rabies, which was detected on 27 February and closed in June 2012,
 - and in accordance with Article 8.12.3. of Chapter 8.12. of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* (2014),
- the Delegate of Latvia to the OIE declares on 8 December 2014 that his country is free from rabies.