
Detailed Fiscal Analysis

Bill Provisions

Current law requires a county board of commissioners to reimburse individuals for medical expenses incurred resulting from the bite of a rabid animal. A person must seek reimbursement within four months after the injury and must present an itemized account of the expenses and an affidavit signed by the individual making the claim and his or her physician. Under current law, the maximum reimbursement amount permitted is \$200.

The bill would change current law so that county commissioners would no longer be required to provide reimbursement, but could *choose* to do so if they determined that the injured person could not pay the medical costs without “deprivation of basic needs.” The bill increases the amount that commissioners may reimburse to \$1,500 per incident.

Fiscal Impact Analysis

For most counties the bill could have no annual fiscal impact. In fact, making the reimbursement permissive and contingent upon demonstrated financial hardship by the injured party could reduce any costs to counties from current law. The analysis below discusses the occurrence of animal bites and rabies in Ohio, along with possible maximum costs a county could incur if the commissioners chose to provide reimbursement.

In a given year, an average of 12 counties could incur costs ranging from minimal to \$12,000 or more. This estimate was developed using a three-year average calculated from the data of persons injured by confirmed rabid animals presented in Table 1. The high end of the estimate assumes 8 people in a county would be injured by a confirmed rabid animal and receive the maximum reimbursement permitted under the bill. The average cost of the post-exposure medication (PEP) for an adult is about \$1,500.

LBO could not determine the number of persons that have actually been reimbursed under ORC section 955.41. In 1999, the largest number of people that could have been reimbursed is forty-one. However, anecdotal information suggests that the actual number of people reimbursed is significantly less than this, as it appears to be uncommon for individuals to seek reimbursement from a county under the section. This could be due to the fact that most people are not aware that they can be reimbursed and/or that most people have health insurance coverage that would cover a significant portion of the costs, if not all of the cost¹.

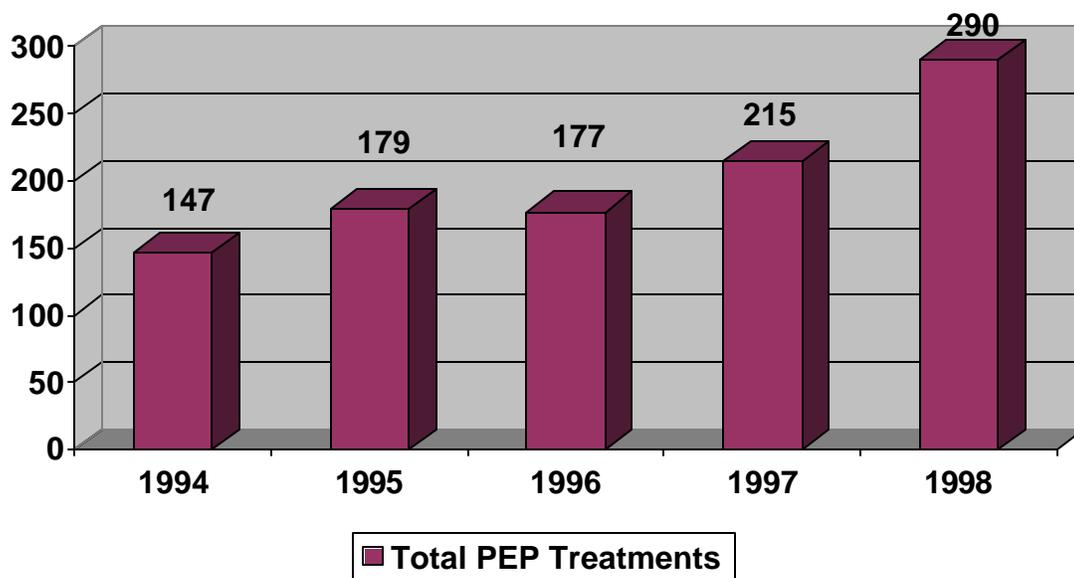
Under current law, a county is only required to reimburse a person for PEP treatments if the animal that injured the person was confirmed to have rabies. To confirm that an animal is rabid it must be tested in a laboratory. In Ohio, the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) does this testing for local health

¹ The Ohio Department of Health’s “Data Bulletin #1: Ohioans without Health Insurance, 1997-1998” reports that since 1990 Ohio’s uninsured rate has ranged between 10 and 12 percent.

departments. In 1999, 41 persons received PEP treatments as a result of injuries from animals confirmed as rabid². In 1997 and 1998 the numbers were 22 and 28 persons, respectively. The attached Table 1 lists the counties where persons have been injured by a confirmed rabid animal in at least one of the last three years.

Graph 1 shows the number of persons that reported receiving the PEP treatments from 1994 to 1998. These numbers are significantly higher than for persons receiving PEP treatments as a result of injuries from animals confirmed as rabid. The instances of known persons receiving PEP treatments rose fairly steadily from 1994 to 1998, as shown in Graph 1 below. However, ODH believes that the actual number of people receiving PEP treatments is likely higher than shown in Graph 1 because doctors in Ohio are not required to report providing the rabies treatment. (Note: the data for persons receiving treatments as a result of injuries from animals confirmed as rabid is believed to be accurate as DOH performs the tests that are used to confirmed whether or not an animal has rabies.)

Graph 1: Reported Persons Undergoing PEP Treatment for Rabies, 1994-1998



Rabies in Ohio

In Ohio, skunks and bats have historically been the major source of rabies infection to pets, livestock, and people. Since 1990, the number of animals confirmed positive for rabies has remained at low levels (10 to 20 per year). Ohio's local health departments investigate over 23,000 animal bite incidents annually. Because of health department activities and medical treatment, human rabies is rare in Ohio. The last case was documented in 1970. Nationally, about four human cases are confirmed annually.

² All Ohio data on animal bites, possible rabies exposures, and PEP treatments were obtained from the Ohio Department of Health.”

Skunk rabies activity is centered in Holmes County, while bat rabies occurs randomly throughout the state. Since the late 1970s, a strain of rabies associated with raccoons rapidly spread along the east coast moving from 15 to 50 miles per year. When raccoon rabies first moves into a new area it can be explosive in nature, with as many as 50 percent of raccoons testing positive.

Compounding the problem is that this strain frequently "spills over" into pets, and other wildlife - including those species that we traditionally consider low risk for rabies (groundhog, rabbit, deer, etc). In other states where raccoon rabies has spread, human exposures and the demand for rabies treatment usually increased 10-fold.

Raccoon rabies spread from Pennsylvania into northeast Ohio, with two isolated raccoon-strain cases identified in 1996. By the end of 1997, 59 raccoons, 2 cats, and a skunk were confirmed with raccoon-strain rabies in Trumbull, Mahoning, and Columbiana counties.

General Rabies Information and National Data

Rabies is a viral disease that affects wild animals, domestic animals (like pets and livestock), and humans³. People are exposed to rabies when virus from an infected animal gets into an open wound (a bite) or into a mucous membrane. Rabies is still virtually always fatal once clinical symptoms appear, but the disease can usually be prevented by administering a series of rabies immunizations - if the series is started shortly after the exposure occurred. The treatment for rabies consists of a series of 6 shots given in the arm over a 1-month period.

Rabies is a disease that naturally affects mammals, such as raccoons, skunks, foxes, and bats. One cannot get rabies from birds, snakes or fish. In the United States, rabies is much more common in wild animals than in pets. In the United States, about 93 of every 100 reported cases of rabies are in wild animals. Most of the cases are found in raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes. Raccoons are the most common wild animals with rabies today. Cats had the largest number of reported rabies cases in pets.

There are two common types of rabies. One type is "furious" rabies. Animals with this type are hostile, may bite at objects, and have an increase in saliva. The second and more common form is known as paralytic or "dumb" rabies. An animal with "dumb" rabies is timid and shy. It often rejects food and has paralysis of the lower jaw and muscles.

Signs of rabies in animals include:

- Changes in an animal's behavior
- General sickness
- Problems swallowing
- An increase in drool or saliva
- Wild animals that appear abnormally tame or sick
- Animals that may bite at everything if excited
- Difficulty moving or paralysis
- Death

Animals in the early stage of rabies may not have any signs, although they can still infect if they bite. The incubation period is the time from the animal bite to when signs appear. In rabies, it is usually 1-3

³ General rabies information and national statistics are from the Center for Disease Control web site.

months. But it can last as long as several years. Once the virus reaches the brain or spinal cord, signs of the disease appear.

In humans, signs and symptoms usually occur 30-90 days after the bite. Once people develop symptoms, they almost always die. Early symptoms of rabies include fever, headache, sore throat, and feeling tired. As the virus gets to the brain, the person may act nervous, confused, and upset.

Confirmed Rabies Cases Per County, 1997-1999

COUNTY	1997	1998	1999
ALLEN	1		
ASHTABULA		1	
BUTLER		1	3
COLUMBIANA		2	
DEFIANCE		1	
FRANKLIN	4	5	
FULTON	1	1	
GUERNSEY		1	
HAMILTON		1	
HOLMES	5		
JACKSON	1		
LICKING			2
LUCAS			8
MAHONING	4	3	1
MARION	1	5	
MONROE			3
PICKAWAY		3	
PORTAGE			6
SCIOTO			2
STARK	1	2	
SUMMIT			1
TRUMBULL		1	5
VAN WERT			5
WASHINGTON	4	1	
WAYNE			1
WOOD			4
TOTAL	22	28	41
<i>Statewide Per County Average</i>	<i>0.25</i>	<i>0.32</i>	<i>0.47</i>

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