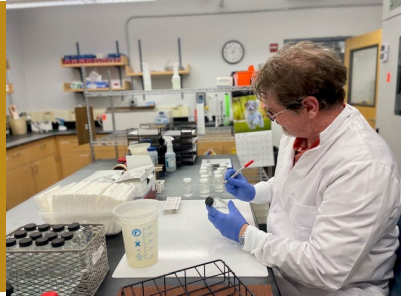




Celebrating Public Health Lab Week

HHS Oversight

April 17, 2026

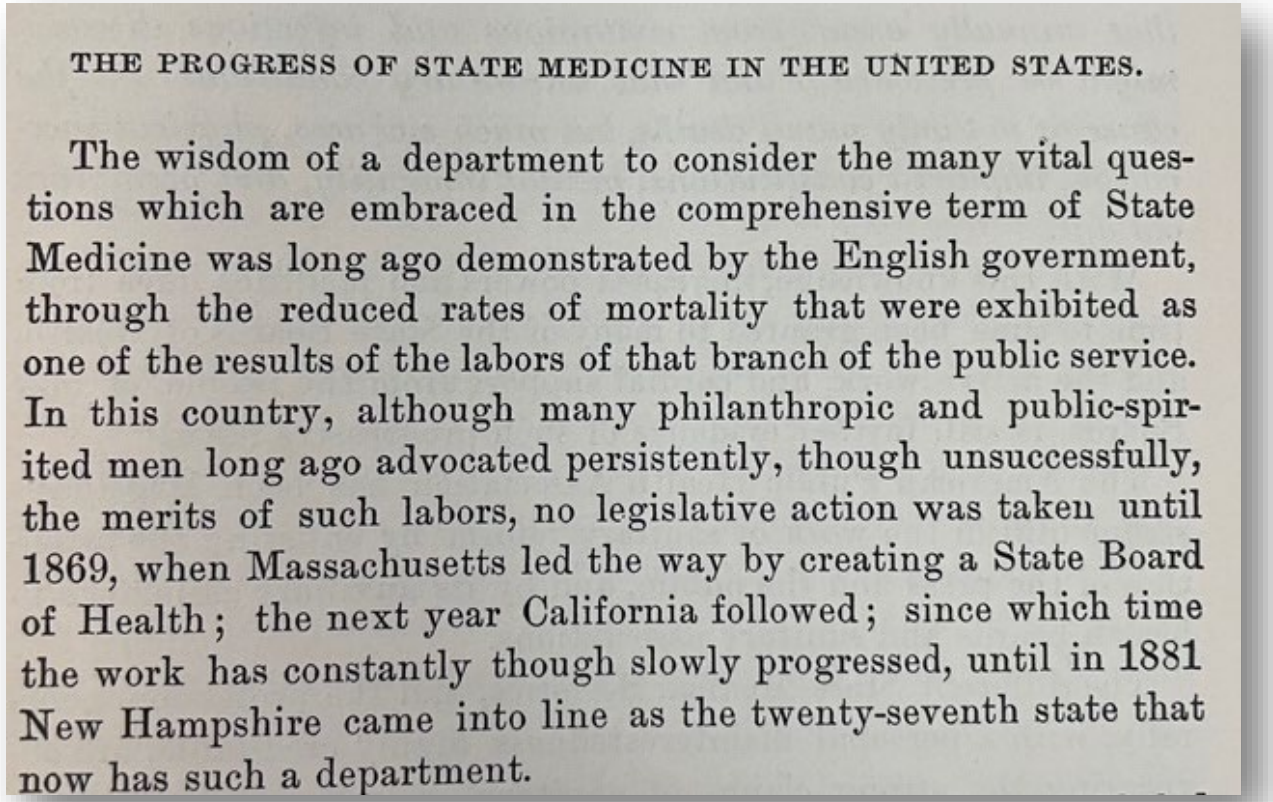
Department of HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES | Division of Public Health

New Hampshire Department of Health Founded, 1881

RSA 125:9 (current)
The commissioner of the department of health and human services shall:

I. Take cognizance of the interests of health and life among the people.

II. **Make investigations and inquiries concerning the causes of epidemics and other diseases, the sources of morbidity and mortality,** and the effects of localities, employments, conditions, circumstances, and the environment on the public health…



THE PROGRESS OF STATE MEDICINE IN THE UNITED STATES.

The wisdom of a department to consider the many vital questions which are embraced in the comprehensive term of State Medicine was long ago demonstrated by the English government, through the reduced rates of mortality that were exhibited as one of the results of the labors of that branch of the public service. In this country, although many philanthropic and public-spirited men long ago advocated persistently, though unsuccessfully, the merits of such labors, no legislative action was taken until 1869, when Massachusetts led the way by creating a State Board of Health; the next year California followed; since which time the work has constantly though slowly progressed, until in 1881 New Hampshire came into line as the twenty-seventh state that now has such a department.

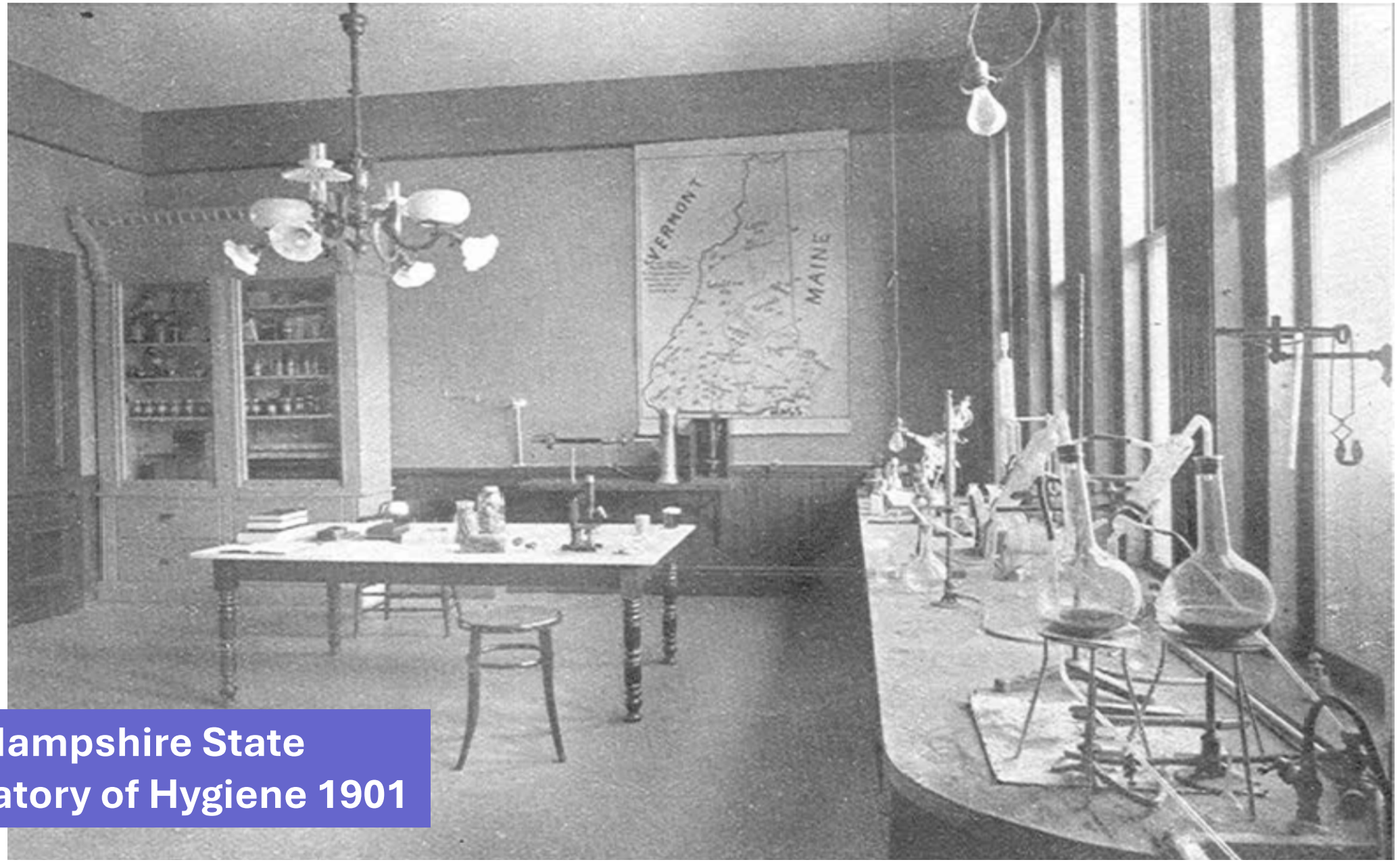
Volume 1, New Hampshire Board of Health, 1882

1882

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives:

We congratulate the Legislature of New Hampshire that it has recognized, in the interests of the people, a claim which science and practical experience have demonstrated to be inseparably interwoven with not only the physical, but also the intellectual and moral, welfare of a state or nation.

Volume 1, New Hampshire Board of Health, 1882



New Hampshire State Laboratory of Hygiene 1901

New Hampshire Public Health Laboratory

1901 — Established

Laboratories in Concord and Hanover at the turn of the 20th Century

1927 — Milk Testing

Milk tested bacteriologically and chemically for pathogens and adulterants

1965 — General Funds

In 1965, the NH Public Health Lab had a budget of $98,000

1972 — New Location

NH Public Health Lab moved to the current location on 29 Hazen Drive in 1972

2001 — 100th Anniversary

NH Public Health Lab celebrated 100th year anniversary in 2001

2004 — New Wing

New laboratory wing occupied at 29 Hazen Drive in 2004

2009 — H1N1 Pandemic

Global “Swine Flu” Pandemic. Estimated 232 cases in New Hampshire

2011 — Water Analysis Lab

Water Analysis Laboratory moved from Department of Environmental Services to NH Public Health Lab

2020-2023 — COVID-19 Pandemic

Critical role in COVID-19 response. Processed **more than 5x the number of samples per year** compared to pre-pandemic

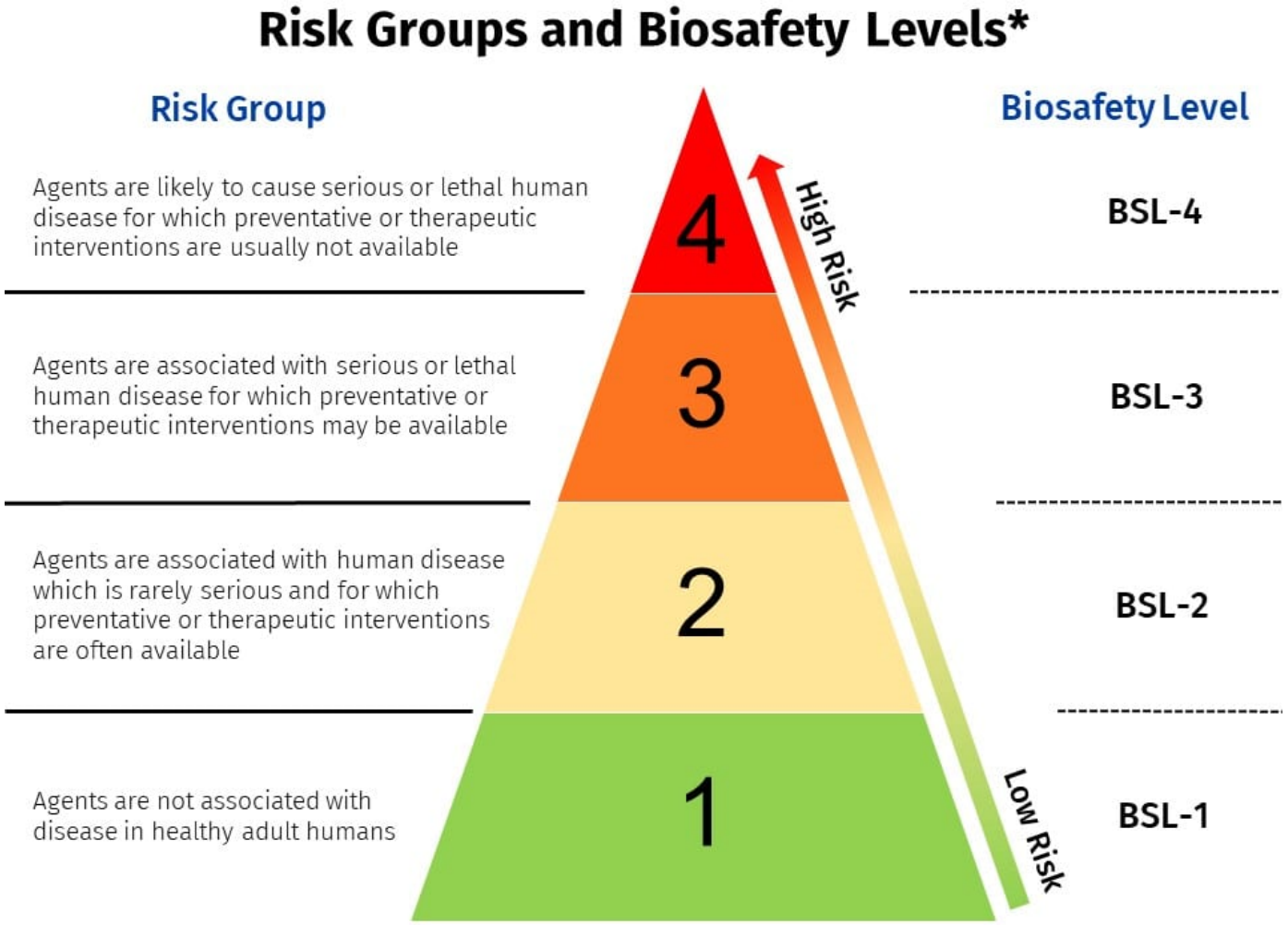
2024-2026 — Bird Flu

H5 bird flu is widespread in wild birds and causing outbreaks in poultry and U.S. dairy cows and limited cases of human illness among dairy workers

New Hampshire
Public Health Laboratory Core Functions



Staying Safe: Different Precautions for Different Risks



Examples
Ebola, Marburg Virus
Tuberculosis, Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE)
Influenza, Lyme Disease
Non-infectious bacteria

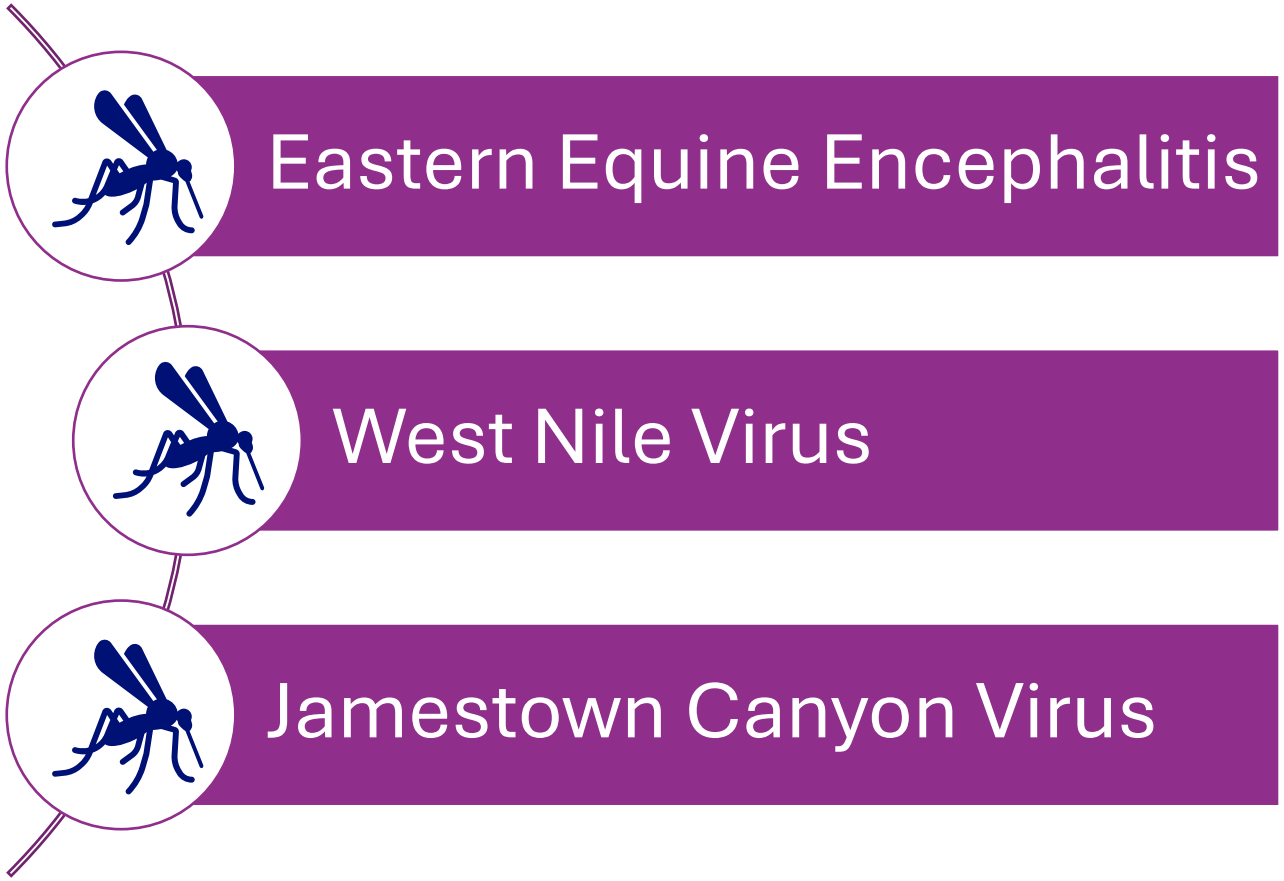


Infectious Disease Control

Identifying Diseases Quickly to Prevent Spread

- Influenza, RSV, COVID-19 and other respiratory diseases
- HIV, Viral Hepatitis, and Sexually Transmitted Diseases
- Measles and other vaccine preventable diseases
- Arboviral diseases
- Rabies
- Bacterial and Mycobacterial infection including Tuberculosis
- Healthcare-associated infections (HAI) and Antibiotic Susceptibility Testing (AST)
- Foodborne bacterial disease and Norovirus

Coming Soon To Your Backyard: Mosquito Season

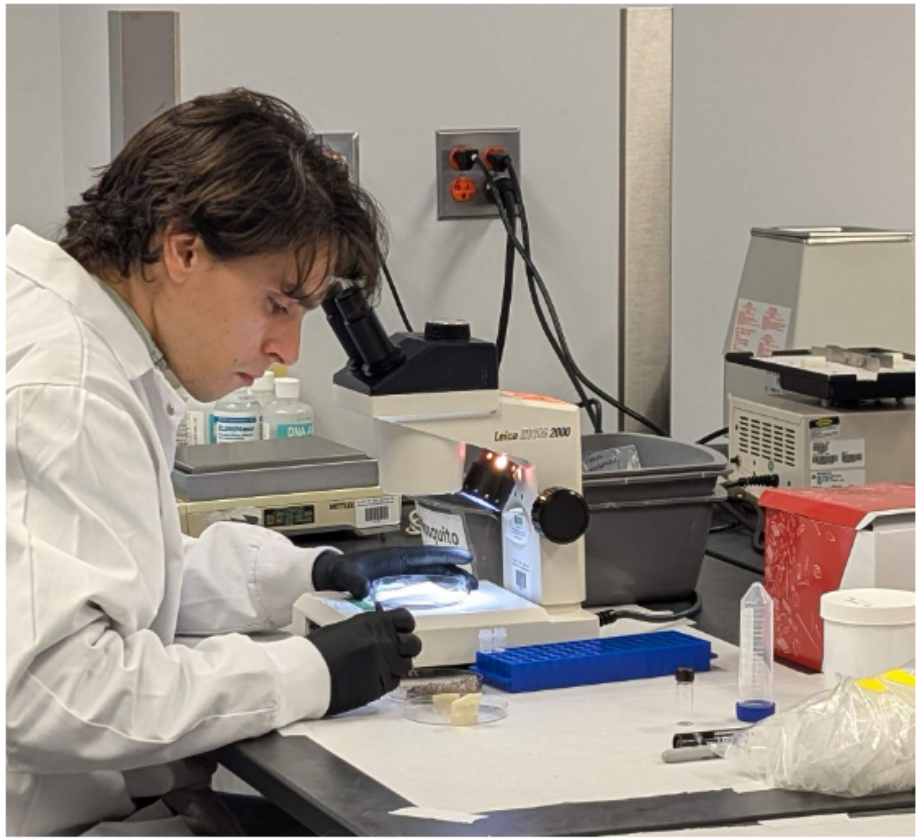


The Public Health Lab tested more than 250,000 mosquitoes in 2025

Arboviral Illness Surveillance



Mosquito-borne viruses are also known as arboviruses. As one part of the New Hampshire **Arboviral Illness Surveillance, Prevention, and Response Plan**, the PHL conducts regular, weekly testing of mosquitoes. Such ongoing testing is known as surveillance.



A PHL technician counts mosquitoes submitted for testing.

This surveillance testing helps inform New Hampshire communities and residents about the number of infected mosquitoes and where in the state these mosquitos may be.

- The PHL tests the mosquitoes to determine what viruses are present in each community.
- Each year, about 35 towns gather mosquitoes—either on their own or by contracting for mosquito collection—and send them to the PHL.
- Any town can choose to participate in the surveillance testing. If interested, work with your **local health officer** to join the program.

RABIES AND ANIMAL BITES

PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

Rabies is a rare but serious viral disease transmitted through infected mammal bites and scratches. The virus kills over 55,000 people worldwide annually mostly in Asia and Africa where post exposure treatment is not as widely available. New Hampshire's State Lab reported 33 positive animal cases in 2023. Once acute illness has begun there is no effective way to treat rabies. The current emphasis is on the prevention of the disease by avoiding exposure and enforcing vaccination. When a person has been bitten by a rabid animal, or bitten by an animal that is high risk for having rabies, a prophylactic injection of immune globulin and a series of rabies vaccine shots is usually begun immediately.

Applicable Laws

RSA 436 Diseases of Domestic Animals: Rabies Control, Licenses and Authority

RSA 141-C Communicable Disease: Quarantine and Reporting

RSA 466 Dogs and Cats: Licensing, Handling, Commercial Establishments





Rabies: Fatal, But Preventable

Peak season is

July–August due to bat migration.

Raccoons and foxes have the highest positivity rates.

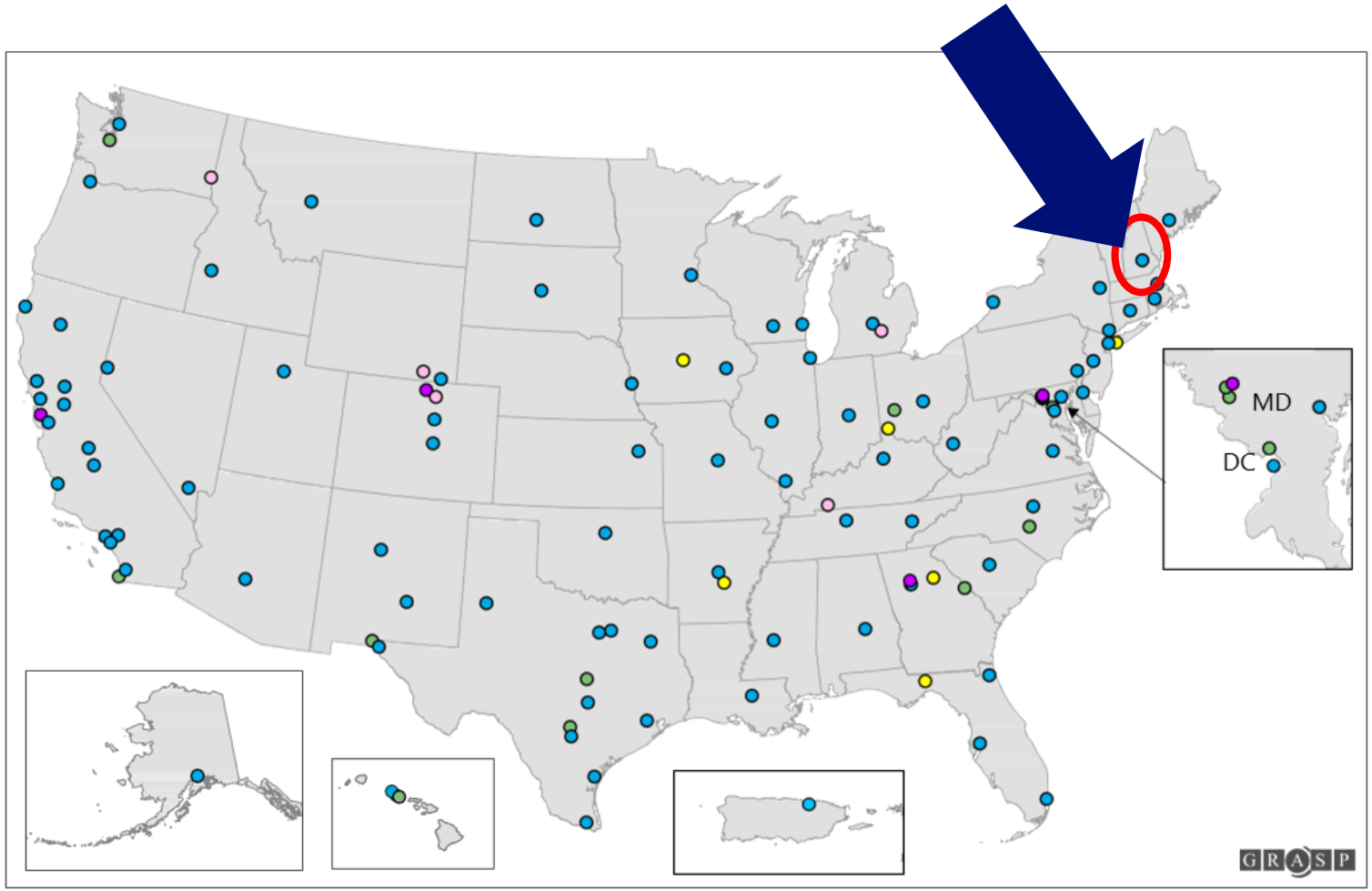
The DPH PHL is the only NH lab capable of diagnostic rabies testing.

In 2025: 614 potential exposures investigated, 605 animals tested, 28 positives identified.

Fast testing prevents unnecessary healthcare costs.

Rabies is 100% fatal once symptoms begin, but completely preventable with timely post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP).

Ready to Respond to Outbreaks and Threats to Health



Part of national network ready to respond to:

- Disease outbreaks
- Newly emergent diseases
- Product contamination and/or tampering
- Chemical, microbiological, and radiological incidents
- Environmental exposures to known and emergent chemical contaminants
- Terrorism

Thank you to our Public Health Lab for its quiet precision that saves lives and keeps New Hampshire's early-warning systems strong.

