

RABIES SPECIMENS (Animal Rabies Test)

Rabies Laboratory Submission Policy

For questions, please contact the Rabies Laboratory at 410-767-6177

Fax: (410) 333-7790

Hours of Operation

The DHMH Laboratories Administration Rabies Laboratory operates from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM weekdays (Monday through Friday except on holidays and salary reduction days [SRD]). **On-call laboratory scientists are available for requests** that require test results as soon as possible so that a medical determination on rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) can be made.

Specimens must be received at the DHMH Laboratories Administration by 12:00 PM on Fridays to have the test results reported by Friday 4:30 PM. Specimens received on Fridays after 12:00 PM will have the results ready the next regular workday.

Specimens received on evenings from Monday through Friday, Fridays from 12:00 PM to 4:30 PM, on a weekend, SRD, or on a State holiday will be processed on the next regular workday, except for situations that require test results as soon as possible so that a medical determination about rabies PEP can be made (emergency examination). In these situations, prior approval by the epidemiology staff in DHMH Office of Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Outbreak Response (IDEOR) is necessary before testing will be initiated by on-call laboratory scientists. (For details, please see the Emergency Examination Requests section below).

Delivery Procedures

Delivery of specimens must be from Monday through Friday 7:30AM to 6:00PM (regular workdays) to the DHMH Laboratory Tower in the Receiving Area on the Service Level of the O'Connor Building at 201 W. Preston Street. All animal submission of specimen must be routed through the local health department and sent via courier service. Do not use the U.S. Postal Service or other public transportation service to send specimens. (For emergency examination situations, please see the Emergency Examination Requests section below).

Ordering Tests

For routine testing Monday through Friday, all local health departments must use the DHMH Laboratories Administration's MyLIMS (Laboratory Information Management Systems) (<http://starlims.dhmh.md.gov/starlims10.dhmlabs.prod/>) for submission of specimens. The updated rabies submission form (DHMH 1188 11/10) will print out automatically when the animal rabies test is ordered through the MyLIMS system, and must be included in the cooler and attached to the specimen being submitted. One Rabies Submission Form should accompany each animal submitted. Specimens approved for emergency testing must be accompanied by a fully completed handwritten Rabies Submission Form if access to MyLIMS is not possible. An emergency contact name and phone number must be listed on the Rabies Submission Form. The updated rabies submission form (DHMH 1188 11/10) can be downloaded from our website at <http://dhmh.state.md.us/labs/html/rabies.html>.

Criteria for Animal Submission

Terrestrial animals acceptable for submission to DHMH are rabies vector species (e.g., raccoons, foxes, skunks, etc.) that expose humans, livestock, or pets. Exposure is defined as a bite that breaks the skin or contact of mucous membranes or broken skin with either animal saliva or nervous tissue. Birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians will not be accepted for rabies testing under any circumstances. Small rodents, including squirrels, chipmunks, gerbils, guinea pigs, hamsters, rabbits, mice, rats, voles, shrews and moles, will not be accepted for testing unless (1) the animal has bitten a human and (2) prior approval for testing has been authorized by the DHMH IDEOR epidemiology staff . Most recent human cases of rabies in the U.S. have been associated with bats, and bat bites may be difficult to recognize. Bats should be submitted for testing in all cases of direct human contact with a bat or when bite or mucous membrane contact cannot be ruled out.

Emergency Examination Requests

Some situations that occur after regular business hours may require rabies test results as soon as possible so that a medical determination about rabies PEP can be made. In these situations, on-call laboratory scientists are available; and specimens may be examined Fridays from 12:00 PM to 4:30 PM, on a weekend, SRD, or on a State holiday, **with prior approval** of DHMH IDEOR epidemiology staff. To reach the epidemiology staff during regular business hours, contact the DHMH IDEOR Center for Zoonotic and Vector-borne Diseases (CZVD) at 410-767-5649 (main); 410-767-6703 (DHMH State Public Health Veterinarian); or 410-767-6618 (CZVD Rabies Chief). After hours, use the DHMH IDEOR Epidemiologist-On-Call pager at 410-716-8194.

After receiving approval for an emergency examination request, contact one of the following DHMH Laboratories Administration staff (in the order listed below) to arrange for testing and appropriate submission. (NOTE: In addition to the rabies submission form, the specimen should be accompanied by the submitter's after-hours contact information to receive results).

- 1) Rabies Lab On-Call No: 443-735-1291
- 2) Rabies Lab Supervisor (Kenneth Okogi): 443-799-9490
- 3) Dr. Maria Paz Carlos: 410-241-3303
- 4) OLEPR (Jim Svrjcek or Gwendolyn Paszkiewicz): 410-925-3121
- 5) Dr. Robert Myers: 443-928-0925

Specimen Collection

Animals should be euthanized in a manner that will not destroy the brain tissues to be examined in the diagnosis of rabies. When possible, only the animal's head should be submitted for diagnostic purposes. For animals weighing more than 20 pounds, particularly large dogs, only the head may be submitted for testing. If an animal is being submitted to DHMH Labs from an animal pathology or diagnostic laboratory, and the animal has already been prepared for necropsy, the submitter should submit all or a cross section of the brainstem and half of the cerebrum.

Packaging and Shipping

- All rabies specimens must be placed into coolers that are clearly marked as rabies coolers. No other non-rabies clinical samples may be placed into rabies coolers or these samples will be rejected.
- Rabies coolers must fully close and must be waterproof.

- Each specimen must be individually packaged in a leak- proof bag and clearly labeled.
- Each specimen must be accompanied by a Rabies Submission Form for proper identification.
- All Rabies Submission Forms must be filled out correctly and legibly including exposure type.
- Coolers may be shipped with ice or ice packs but the ice should not occupy more than 1/3 of the cooler.
- Submitters should provide advanced notice and clear labeling for live bat submissions. All other animals being submitted for testing must be dead.
- Submitters should avoid freezing specimens. If frozen specimens are received, testing will be delayed.
- No trash should be sent in rabies coolers.
- Specimens containing ectoparasites (including ticks, fleas and maggots) must be sprayed with insecticide before being packaged and submitted. This is to ensure that couriers and lab staff are protected from infestations. The Rabies Lab will provide insecticide if requested.
- Animal rabies packaging and training video available at <http://dhmh.state.md.us/labs/html/rabies.html>.