

## Rabies Protocol for Specimen Submission

### GENERAL INFORMATION

DCLS provides laboratory rabies testing support to local, state, and federal agencies to include courier transportation to the laboratory. Submitters must collect, package, and submit appropriate specimens for testing.

- All results are sent out using electronic lab reporting Monday – Friday. The laboratory calls all positive results to the local health department or other authorized agency on Fridays, weekends, and holidays.
- DCLS can be contacted with questions or requests for emergency sample submission during normal business hours at 804-648-4480 ext. 275 or 269 and during non-business hours at 804- 335-4617 (EMRS1).
- The submitter must provide accurate contact information for the reporting of positive results or to respond to questions from the laboratory.
- Specimens received by 9:00 a.m. (Monday–Friday) will be tested on the day of receipt. Routine samples received after 9:00 a.m., will be tested the following day.
- **Emergency testing requires approval and notification from a local or district Health Director and consultation with the State Public Health Veterinarian or Veterinary Epidemiologist at 804-864-8113 during normal business hours or 804-840-1814 during non- business hours.**

### SPECIMEN COLLECTION

Specimen collection guidelines may be obtained from the Virginia Department of Health (VDH). Animals will be tested when they expose or are suspected to expose **a person or a domestic animal as defined below by VDH:**

- Any bite, scratch, or other circumstance where saliva or central nervous system tissue from a rabid or suspected rabid animal enters an open wound or mucous membrane by entering the eyes, nose, or mouth. The most efficient route of exposure is a bite.
- As bats can create small injuries that may go unnoticed, evaluating potential rabies exposures due to bat contact includes known bites, direct contact where a bite cannot be ruled out and situations where a bite may go unnoticed (like a person sleeping in a room with a bat).

More information about rabies exposures and response can be found in the [Virginia Guidelines for Rabies Prevention and Control](#).

### SUBMISSION FORM

The submission form **must** be completed in its entirety and individually for each animal submitted for testing to ensure accurate and unique identification of each animal and to provide the necessary contact information for result reporting. Incomplete information may delay laboratory testing or result in sample rejection.

### SUBMISSION AND PACKAGING

- All materials collected and submitted for rabies testing are to be considered infectious, and appropriate handling and shipping precautions must be taken to ensure the safety of the collector/submitter, transportation carriers, laboratory staff and the public at large in accordance with 49 CFR Department of Transportation Regulations.
- Gloves must be worn when packaging specimens.
- Live animals are not accepted by the laboratory.
- Submit the head of humanely euthanized animals to DCLS.
- The entire body of small mammals (i.e., bat, mice) may be submitted for testing.
- DCLS cannot necropsy large animals (i.e., horse, cow, bear). Call DCLS to

coordinate all large animal sample submissions.

- Submit specimens to the laboratory promptly and cold (not frozen) using frozen cold packs to reduce decomposition.
- All specimens should be sprayed or dusted for fleas and ticks with a pesticide prior to packaging.
- All diagnostic specimens must be triple packaged and clearly labeled with a health department or animal control internal number or identifier and animal species

### **Suggested Materials for Use and Proper Handling**

- |                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| 1) Primary Container:        | Ziploc bags or heavy-duty garbage bags appropriately sized for the specimens with an absorbent material placed in the bag to prevent leakage. If sharp objects protrude from the specimen such as shattered bone, wrap the specimen in several layers of newspaper.<br><b>Always tightly seal or fasten the primary container to contain the specimen.</b>   |
| 2) Secondary Container:      | A securely sealed metal can, heavy plastic pail with a lid or a heavy-duty plastic garbage bag may be used as the secondary container. The Rabies Submission Form <b><u>must</u></b> be enclosed in its own plastic bag (Ziploc) and taped to the outside of the secondary container.  |
| 3) Rigid Shipping Container: | DCLS-provided coolers labeled “ <i>Rabies</i> .” If a cooler is not available, a tightly sealed, thick-walled Styrofoam container with or without an exterior fiberboard liner may be used. It <b><u>must</u></b> be clearly labeled “ <i>Rabies</i> ” with permanent marker. The secondary container is placed inside the rigid shipping container with frozen cold packs and cushion material to prevent damage to the specimen during transport.<br><br><b><u>Note:</u> When shipping more than one specimen in this container, each specimen <u>must</u> be individually bagged and placed in secondary containers along with a separate submission form for each animal attached.</b> |

**\*See page 3 for a diagram of the packaging instructions\***

- The **outside of the container should be cleaned** with a disinfectant (Ex. 10% bleach: 9 parts water and 1 part household bleach) to reduce the risk of exposure to anyone handling a package containing a potentially positive specimen.
- Secure the shipping container (snap lid or tape) for transport and address the package to:

DCLS Richmond  
600 North 5<sup>th</sup> Street  
Richmond, VA 23219  
**ATTN: Rabies**

## Diagram of Packaging Instructions

