

## Rabies Laboratory Specimen Policy and Practice for New York State

Robert Rudd, Rabies Laboratory Director, New York State Department of Health, Albany, NY

### Examination of Animals for Evidence of Rabies Infection (New York State only)

- 1) Submission of a rabies specimen requires prior approval of the local health authority (County Health Department or district office of the New York State Department of Health). Emergency and after-hour exceptions can be made with the approval of the Rabies Laboratory: **Telephone 518-869-4527; After-Hours 518-527-7369 or 527-7370**; or go to the NYS Dept of Health Rabies Laboratory website at: <http://www.wadsworth.org/rabies/>
- 2) Acceptable specimens include only:
  - a) **Rabies suspect mammals** for which there has been a reported bite, scratch, or other possible saliva or nervous tissue exposure to a human.
  - b) **Rabies suspect mammals** with reported bites to or other “intimate” contact with a domestic animal.
  - c) **All bats** encountered in situations where human or domestic animal contacts can't conclusively be ruled out.
  - d) **Highly suspect surveillance specimens** (no reported contacts), including:
    - i) Rabies vector species showing clear signs of rabies infection from an area w/o previous confirmed cases
    - ii) A mammal not commonly recognized as a rabies vector, but showing clear signs of rabies infection
    - iii) A domestic animal that dies or is euthanized under the care of a veterinarian for which rabies is part of the differential diagnosis of neurologic disorder.
  - e) Specimens associated with laboratory-approved enhanced surveillance programs associated with wildlife vaccination trials.
- 3) **No live animals will be accepted by the Laboratory.** The intact head only of approved specimens will be accepted. Exceptions include bats, which should be submitted whole, and livestock, for which brainstem and cerebellum, removed by a veterinarian, constitute the specimen.

**Do not submit the entire head from livestock.** The appropriate samples can be removed from the calvarium with minimal contact by obtaining the sample through the foramen magnum. (A written description with a diagram of this technique is available from Robert Rudd, Director of the Rabies Laboratory).
- 4) **Specimens must be properly packaged in a standard rabies shipping container** (available at the County Health Department), or at least contained in two separately sealed plastic bags, and a sealed cardboard container, assuring strict biocontainment. Specimens must be accompanied by a completed rabies specimen history form. See rabies specimen packing and shipping instructions for details.
- 5) Rabies diagnosis is performed weekdays from 8:00 am - 4:30 pm. Specimens received evenings, weekends, or holidays are processed the next regular work day.
- 6) **Emergency Examination:** An animal that has bitten a human and is highly suspect of rabies infection because of species, behavior, and location of capture, and for which a physician is awaiting the results before initiating post-exposure rabies prophylaxis, will be examined on a weekend or holiday, by prior arrangement with the laboratory. Such specimens must arrive at the rabies laboratory prior to 11:00 am to be tested the same day, and should be accompanied by telephone numbers of the after-hour contact to receive results. Because some bat bites may be more difficult to recognize than those of other rabies vector species, all cases of direct human contact with a bat, when bite or mucous membrane contact cannot be ruled out, should be treated as an emergency.
- 7) **During warm months**, it is particularly important that specimens being shipped on Fridays or preceding holidays be sent with attention to prompt delivery and proper packaging. If hand delivery cannot be arranged, then overnight courier service should be requested (e.g., Federal Express Next-Day Service, UPS Saturday Delivery, U.P.S., U.S. Postal Service Express Mail). Instruct packers to place one or two extra freezer packs in the standard rabies shipping container.
- 8) **Routine rabies examination results** will be sent by FAX to the county or district health office, that shall in turn notify other interested parties. Reports will be available at the local health office during the workday morning following receipt of the specimen at the laboratory. Except for emergencies and late Friday submissions, local offices are asked to refrain from calling the laboratory routinely for examination results. Reports of rabid animals will continue to be immediately reported by telephone to the local health authority.