

New Jersey Department of Health
PACKAGING AND TRANSPORT OF ANIMAL RABIES SPECIMENS TO
THE NEW JERSEY RABIES LABORATORY
March 2014

Persons who are bitten by an animal or come into contact with a suspect rabid animal should notify the local health department (LHD) having jurisdiction where the animal is located. Animals infected with the rabies virus will display strange behavior, including aggression, and signs of neurologic impairment such as vocalizing, circling, paralysis, etc. Specimens SHOULD NOT be sent to the Rabies Laboratory without first consulting with the LHD where the incident occurred. A directory of LHDs is posted online: www.localhealth.nj.gov. LHDs can be contacted through the police department in the event of emergencies on nights, weekends, and holidays.

I. PREPARATION OF SPECIMENS FOR SUBMISSION

NOTE: Once submitted to the Rabies Laboratory, specimen remains cannot be returned to veterinarians or animal owners under any circumstances.

1. If the animal is larger than a squirrel or over 2 pounds (e.g., raccoon, most dogs and adult cats), **ONLY THE HEAD OR BRAIN OF THE ANIMAL** will be accepted for testing.
2. **During the tick season, specimens are to be sprayed with an insecticide** such as a flea and tick spray containing permethrin, to kill ticks before packaging.
3. Bats may be submitted alive; however, they should be packaged in an **escape-proof** container (e.g., coffee can with tight fitting lid) and labeled: **“CAUTION-LIVE BAT.”** Under no circumstances should a bat, dead or alive, be wrapped in anything that could hinder access to it (e.g., a cloth towel, packing material, etc.)
4. The specimen should not be frozen, as freezing delays the test process. Frozen specimens can still be tested, but freezing delays testing and increases the probability that the sample will be unsatisfactory for testing.
5. If the specimen is not being transported immediately, refrigerate it and pack as directed below before transport. Specimens that will be in transit for more than 12 hours should be packaged as directed below and, additionally, placed in an insulated container.
6. The specimen should be placed in a watertight container such as a heavy plastic bag tightly secured, or a container (not glass) with a tight fitting lid to **prevent fluid leakage**. This container should be placed in a larger waterproof, unbreakable container, and the space between the 2 containers packed with coolant packs, NOT DRY ICE OR ICE IN BAGS. The specimen should be in a separate container from the cold packs.

NOTE: Couriers are instructed not to pick up specimens that are improperly packaged.

7. In the event that individuals are exposed to fluid leakage from an animal head, splashed with fluids, or cut during the specimen preparation process, they should immediately wash the exposed areas thoroughly with soap and water. The name and telephone number of the exposed individual should be added to the Rabies Examination Request form and the type of exposure noted.
8. The Rabies Examination Request form (VIR-16), (<http://www.state.nj.us/health/forms/vir-16.dot>) should be completely filled out and placed in an envelope accompanying the specimen; either securely attached to, or inside, the transport container. If put inside the transport container, the exam form should be in a separate plastic bag from cold packs, preventing it from becoming wet.

Address specimens to:

New Jersey Department of Health
Public Health, Environmental and Agricultural
Laboratories (PHEAL)
Rabies Laboratory
New Jersey State Police Headquarters
3 Schwarzkopf Drive
Ewing, New Jersey 08628

NOTE: Do not address rabies specimens to specific individuals.

The State Police Headquarters Complex is located near Exit 1 of I-95, bordered by Upper Ferry Road and Route 175/River Road. For GPS and mapping devices, use “98 State Police Drive East, Ewing, NJ 08628” to locate the guard station at the entrance to the Complex. The guard can direct the driver to the Laboratory building to the right.

For specimen delivery information, contact: **609-530-8387**.

Rabies specimen submission forms and instructions are posted on the NJDOH website, <http://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/rabies/techinfo.shtml>.

Health Officers and their staffs can reach Rabies Laboratory staff by calling **609-530-8416** and leaving a message. Lab staff will return calls when they are available.

II. TRANSPORTATION OF SPECIMENS TO THE LABORATORY

It is the duty of the local health department to ensure that specimens are packaged properly and submitted to the laboratory on a timely basis. **High priority specimens need to be delivered to the Rabies Laboratory by 3:00 PM Thursday to ensure that testing is completed by the end of the work week.** If possible, animals should not be euthanized until prompt delivery has been arranged, so that rabies observation can continue if transport and testing cannot be performed in a timely manner. (If the animal improves in health, testing may not be necessary.)

The loading dock of the PHEAL is open from 8:30 AM to 4:00 PM to receive specimens for the Rabies Laboratory. Rabies specimens accessioned by the Rabies Laboratory prior to 3:00 PM on a working (non-weekend or state holiday) day will be set up that day and completed on the next working day. Results will be faxed at the completion of testing to the local health agency with jurisdiction over the case. Specimens arriving after 3:00 PM will be set up the next working day with testing completed on the second working day after submission.

NOTE: The New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Division of Animal Health (609-292-3965) may be able to assist with delivery of livestock rabies specimens.

The following methods of transportation can be utilized:

1. Hand delivery – This is the fastest and most reliable method of delivery to ensure the quickest test result turnover time for high priority specimens. If the situation is urgent, **the owner of the affected animal or the person bitten or otherwise exposed can be asked to hand deliver the specimen.** Alternatively, if they are unable to deliver the specimen, they can arrange for a family member or friend to do so. Specimens can be delivered on a 24-hour basis (see instructions below).
2. Private delivery services – There are numerous private delivery services that will transport specimens. Specimens must always be sent for arrival on non-holiday weekdays.

NOTE: Express Mail and other delivery services offered through the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) should not be used because such specimens are not classified as “mailable” and the USPS does not deliver specimens directly to the Rabies Laboratory, resulting in transit times of 3 days or more. Specimens delivered by USPS have decomposed during transit and could not be tested.

3. State Courier – There is a courier system that picks up laboratory specimens from various locations throughout the State and deliveries them to the PHEAL. Local health departments can assist with utilizing these couriers.

Because courier pick-up schedules can change without notice and utilizing the state courier system will usually result in at least a 1-4 day delivery delay compared to other methods of transportation, **couriers should only be used for surveillance, animal exposure, or very low risk human exposure specimens.** The entity dropping off the specimen at a courier pick-up location is responsible to verify that the specimen was subsequently picked up and delivered to the State laboratory. If there is a question or problem with a courier, please contact Fenton Snell at PHEAL (609-530-8519).

4. In some circumstances (e.g., high-risk human exposures), local health departments may be able to assign staff to deliver specimens to the Rabies Laboratory.

Delivery during normal hours, Monday through Friday between 6:00 AM and 6:00 PM.

Enter the State Police Headquarters Complex via the Alternate Entrance off Upper Ferry Road. Follow directions (<http://www.state.nj.us/health/forms/vir-16inst.shtml>) to the PHEAL building. Specimens should be delivered to the Loading Dock/Specimen Receiving area in the rear of the building.

Delivery during weekends, holidays, and weekdays after 6:00 PM and before 6:00 AM

Enter the State Police Headquarters Complex via the Main Entrance off Route 175/River Road. Follow directions (<http://www.state.nj.us/health/forms/vir-16inst.shtml>) to the PHEAL building. Specimens should be delivered to the Loading Dock/Specimen Receiving area in the rear of the building, where the security guard will facilitate specimen submission.

Prepared by:
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