

**Packaging and Transport of Animal Rabies Specimens to the
Public Health and Environmental Laboratories (PHEL)
June 2017**

Specimens should not be sent to the PHEL without consulting with the Local Health Department (LHD) where the rabies 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

1. All animals, except bats, must be decapitated prior to packaging and shipping to PHEL. **ONLY THE HEAD OR BRAIN OF AN ANIMAL** will be accepted for testing. Animal heads cannot be returned to the animal owner.

Note: Once submitted to PHEL, specimen remains cannot be returned to veterinarians or animal owners under any circumstances.

2. Bats may be submitted alive; however, they must 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, or packing material).
3. The specimen should not be frozen, as freezing delays the test process. Frozen specimens can still be tested, but freezing increases the probability that the sample will be unsatisfactory for testing. If samples are accidentally frozen, keep them frozen until delivery.
4. 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 placed in an insulated container. Improper packaging may lead to decomposition of the brain. Once the brain is decomposed, the specimen will be reported as “unsatisfactory.”
5. 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. Leaking or improperly packaged specimens cannot be shipped to other public health laboratories.

Note: Couriers are instructed not to pick up specimens that are leaking or otherwise improperly packaged.

6. If individuals are exposed to brain tissue or fluid from the head or they cut themselves 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 (VIR-16), noting the type of exposure that occurred.
7. The VIR-16, should be filled out completely and placed in an envelope accompanying the specimen; either securely attached to, or inside, the transport container. If put inside the transport container, the VIR-16 form should be in a separate sealed plastic bag from cold packs, preventing it from becoming wet. The VIR-16 form is posted on the PHEL website: (<http://www.state.nj.us/health/forms/vir-16.dot>)
8. Address specimens to:

New Jersey Department of Health
Public Health and Environmental Laboratories (PHEL)
Rabies Laboratory
New Jersey State Police Headquarters
3 Schwarzkopf Drive
Ewing, NJ 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 "Trooper Drive, Ewing, NJ 08628" to locate the guard station at the entrance to the Complex. The guard can direct the driver to the PHEL Laboratory building for specimen submission.

For questions about rabies testing, specimen packaging and delivery, contact the PHEL via email: rabies.PHEL@doh.nj.gov or call (609) 530-8416, (609) 671-6418, or (609) 671-6419.

For questions about evaluating potential human exposure to rabies, consideration of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and approval of high priority animal specimens, contact the CDS at (609) 826-5964 or 4872 during routine business hours and (609) 392-2020 after-hours (after 5pm or during weekends and holidays). Rabies specimen submission forms and instructions are posted on the PHEL website, <http://www.nj.gov/health/phel/> .

II TRANSPORTATION OF SPECIMENS TO THE LABORATORY

It is the duty of the LHD to ensure that specimens are packaged properly and submitted to the laboratory on a timely basis. **Specimens need to be delivered to the PHEL by 1:00 PM Thursday to ensure that testing is completed by Friday.** 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's health improves, testing may not be necessary).

The loading dock of the PHEL is open from 8:30 AM to 4:00 PM on non-holiday weekdays to receive specimens. Rabies specimens accessioned prior to 1:00 PM on a working (non-weekend or state holiday) should have results reported on the next working day. Results are faxed at the completion of testing directly to the Health Officer with jurisdiction over the case.

Note: The New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Division of Animal Health (609-292-3965) can 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 exposed can hand deliver the specimen.** Alternatively, a friend or family member can deliver the specimen. Specimens can be delivered on a 24-hour basis (see Section III).
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 rabies specimens are not classified as "mailable". Specimens delivered by USPS have decomposed during transit and therefore could not be tested.

3. State Courier - There is a courier system that picks up laboratory specimens from various locations throughout the State and delivers them to the PHEL. LHDs can assist with utilizing these couriers. Because courier pick-up schedules can change without notice and utilizing the state courier system may result in a 1-3 day delivery delay compared to other methods of delivery, **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 location is responsible to verify that the specimen was subsequently picked up and delivered to the PHEL.

If there is a question or problem with a courier, please contact Fenton Snell at PHEL (609-530-8519).

4. In some circumstances (e.g., high-risk human exposures), LHDs may be able to assign staff to deliver specimens to the rabies laboratory.

III DELIVERY TO THE PHEL

Enter the State Police Headquarters Complex via Trooper Drive off Route 175/River Road. The State Police guard will direct the driver to the PHEL facility. Follow the directions for delivery to an intercom outside the PHEL building and tell the security guard that you are delivering a rabies specimen. The guard will raise the gate and the person delivering shall proceed to the Loading Dock/Specimen Receiving area in the rear of the building, where the security guard will facilitate specimen submission.

Prepared by: The New Jersey Department of Health, Communicable Disease Service, Infectious and Zoonotic Diseases Program, Zoonotic Disease Unit