



Rabies Testing for Animal Specimens at the Public Health and Environmental Laboratories

Frequency Asked Questions (FAQ)

May 3, 2017

UPDATES ARE HIGHLIGHTED IN YELLOW

Why is the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) sharing this FAQ?

Starting **April 26, 2017**, the NJDOH Public Health and Environmental Laboratories (PHEL) will begin assessing its rabies testing operation. During the assessment period, PHEL will temporarily partner with other state public health laboratories to provide rabies testing of animal specimens. There will be no disruption in rabies testing service of animal specimens to the New Jersey community. To ensure a seamless transition, the below FAQ is being distributed to local stakeholders.

Who will be testing animal specimens for rabies?

As part of the test sharing practices promoted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and its commitment to maintain continuity of rabies testing, PHEL will be partnering with other state public health laboratories with a record of reliable rabies testing services. As per current protocol, local partners will deliver packaged specimens to PHEL and will continue to receive results from NJDOH.

Who will ship animal specimens to other state public health laboratories?

PHEL will ship animal specimens to the testing laboratory following proper protocol for shipping rabies specimens. Local partners should not ship directly to other public health laboratories.

Who will package animal specimens to send to PHEL?

As per our current process, veterinarians, animal control officers (ACOs) and other local partners (“submitters”) will continue to prepare and package animal specimens for delivery to PHEL. As

a reminder, it is essential that individuals who prepare and package animal specimens for rabies testing (“submitters”) are vaccinated against the rabies virus.

Submitters should review and continue following the current protocol for preparing and packaging animal specimens for rabies testing available online at www.state.nj.us/health/cd/rabies/techinfo.shtml. There are **three important notes to be aware of:**

1. **Except for bats, ALL ANIMALS, INCLUDING SMALL ANIMALS, MUST BE DECAPITATED** prior to packaging and delivery to PHEL.
2. **DO NOT USE** any insecticide (e.g., to control fleas or ticks) on the submitted specimens.
3. Leaking or improperly packaged specimens cannot be shipped to other public health laboratories. To avoid delays, these specimens **MUST BE PACKAGED APPROPRIATELY.**

Who will deliver animal specimens to PHEL?

As per our current process, anyone can deliver properly packaged animal specimens to PHEL. In addition, the courier schedule for the delivery of rabies specimen has not changed.

Will PHEL still accept live bats for rabies testing?

As per our current process, local partners may submit live bats to PHEL. It is important for submitters to adhere to the current protocol of packaging live bats in an escape-proof container labeled “**CAUTION - LIVE BAT**” to ensure safe handling and limit staff exposure at PHEL. The protocol for submitting live bats can be found online at www.state.nj.us/health/cd/rabies/techinfo.shtml.

How will local health departments receive results of rabies testing?

As per our current process, the NJDOH Communicable Disease Service (CDS) will contact local health departments by phone to convey positive and unsatisfactory results. All test reports will be delivered via fax to the health department specified on the submitted VIR-16 form.

What is the schedule for delivering specimens to PHEL and receiving results?

NJDOH has been working to minimize any lag time associated with sending specimens to a partner laboratory. Delays will occur if specimens are not packaged properly or NJDOH VIR-16 requisition forms are incomplete. Samples received by 1 p.m. Monday through Friday will be shipped the same day by PHEL for next day delivery to the testing laboratory. Barring any unforeseen circumstances, reports should be expected within 48 hours of specimen submission (excluding weekends and holiday specimens). Samples received after 1 p.m. may not be shipped until the next day, resulting in an extra day to report results. Samples are not shipped or tested on weekend and holidays.

As per our current process, high priority specimens (previously called “same day specimens”) will be evaluated and approved on a case-by-case basis by CDS.

When will PHEL resume testing of animal specimens?

PHEL is working diligently to identify, train and immunize staff to increase capacity for rabies testing. This partnering initiative is short-term and updates will be provided to local partners as new information becomes available.

Who should I contact if I have any questions?

For questions related to preparing, packaging and tracking specimens, the best way to contact PHEL is to send an email inquiry to rabies.PHEL@doh.nj.gov. A team of technical staff are monitoring this group email and will provide prompt responses.

PHEL may also be contacted by phone at (609) 530-8416, (609) 671-6418 or (609) 671-6419. These phones will be answered or messages left on the associated voicemails will be retrieved multiple times during routine business hours.

For questions related to evaluating potential human exposure to rabies, consideration of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and approval of high priority animal specimens, contact CDS at (609) 826-5964 or 4872 during routine business hours and (609) 392-2020 after-hours (after 5pm or during weekends and holidays).

For questions related to local health departments, please contact the NJDOH Office of Local Public Health (OLPH) at (609) 292-4993.

As per our current process, animal bite reports and questions from the public and veterinarians should be referred to local health departments. Contact information for local health departments can be found online at www.localhealth.nj.gov.