



Criteria for Submission of Samples For Rabies Virus Testing

May 2015

The New Jersey Rabies Laboratory and the Communicable Disease Service are collaborating to reduce the number of animal specimens that are unnecessarily submitted for rabies testing.

State statutes require any person who has knowledge of an animal suspected to be rabid to notify the local health department where the animal is located. **(N.J.S.A. 26:4-78)**

Health Officers and their staff receiving such notifications consult with involved parties, including animal control officers (ACOs), veterinarians, health care providers, and concerned citizens to identify all persons or domestic animals that may have been bitten or exposed to the animal's saliva. Specimens from animals that have exposed persons or domestic animals (pets and livestock) should always be tested unless the specimen is too decomposed or damaged for laboratory testing.

In some situations, Health Officers may choose to also have specific specimens tested because they were found in an area where unknown human exposures may have occurred (near a school play yard) or for surveillance purposes (an area of the municipality where rabid animals have not been previously identified). The rationale for testing should be stated on the Rabies Examination Request Form (VIR-16) that accompanies the specimen to the Rabies lab.

The NJDOH requests that only animals that have exposed or may have exposed a person or domestic animal, as well as those that the Health Officer specifically requests testing for other reasons (surveillance, political, media, etc.), be submitted for laboratory testing.

Health Officers are asked to train and work closely with all ACOs working within their jurisdiction on when to submit a specimen for rabies testing and the proper specimen collection and laboratory submission protocols. ACOs also need to be able to contact and consult with local health staff when they have questions regarding exposures and specimen submission.

When submitting specimens, the VIR-16 should always be completely filled out to indicate all human and domestic animal exposure information and placed in an envelope accompanying the specimen; either securely attached to or inside the transport container and protected from moisture. Health Officers may request that ACOs and other submitters send them a copy of the VIR-16 form at the time of submission.

In general, specimens **should not be submitted** for laboratory testing **unless a positive or negative result will trigger public health action** (prophylaxis of people, confinement of pets, public notification, etc.) by the Health Officer. Testing animals that have not exposed people or domestic animals wastes valuable resources.

Thank you for your cooperation.