

# New Jersey Department of Health Infectious and Zoonotic Disease Program

## RABIES TESTING NOTIFICATION FORM

*This form was developed by the New Jersey Department of Health for use by Health Officers and Veterinarians to notify owners of the protocols and procedures of rabies testing.*

### **Information on Rabies**

Rabies is an infectious disease caused by the rabies virus. The rabies virus lives in the saliva, brain and spinal cord (neural tissue) of infected animals. It is spread when an animal infected with rabies bites a person or animal, or if a rabid animal's saliva or neural tissue comes in contact with a person's or animal's mouth, nose or eyes, or enters a cut in the skin. If a person does not receive the appropriate medical care after a potential rabies exposure, the virus can cause disease in the brain, ultimately resulting in death.

Rabies testing is necessary to determine whether an animal was infected with rabies and to ensure that any persons or animals exposed to rabies can receive prompt medical care and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) if indicated.

### **A pet may need to be tested for rabies for one of the following reasons:**

1. The pet bit or otherwise exposed a person within ten days of death or euthanasia. When a dog, cat, or ferret bites someone, the biting animal must be observed for ten days to make sure that they are healthy at the end of the ten-day period. If they are healthy following this period, there is no risk of rabies to the exposed individual. When the pet cannot be observed for ten days due to death or euthanasia, then it is necessary to test the animal for rabies to be certain that there is no risk of rabies to the exposed person. A ten-day observation period only applies to dogs, cats, and ferrets; if a pet susceptible to rabies other than a dog, cat, or ferret bites someone, rabies testing may be indicated in that pet.
2. The pet is suspected to be infected with rabies (such as displaying clinical signs consistent with rabies).

### **Rabies Testing Protocol**

Rabies testing in animals occurs at the New Jersey Department of Health, Public Health and Environmental Laboratories (PHEL). The Direct Fluorescent Antibody (DFA) test is used for rabies diagnosis. This test has been thoroughly evaluated for more than 40 years and is recognized as the most rapid and reliable of all the tests available for routine use.

Rabies testing is performed post-mortem (after death) and requires brain tissue from the animal. Therefore, the animal's body must be decapitated (the head removed from the body) and the head sent to PHEL for rabies testing. Once submitted to PHEL, the animal's head cannot be returned to owners under any circumstances due to medical waste regulations. Return of the remains that were not submitted for rabies testing will be determined between the veterinarian and the owner. However, the remains of the animal being tested should not be returned to the owner unless it is cremated, or the animal receives a negative result for rabies.

Following owner notification of the protocols and procedures of rabies testing and the necessity for rabies testing, the animal is released for rabies testing as is mandated by state law.

## RABIES TESTING NOTIFICATION FORM

*I acknowledge that I have been notified of the protocols and procedures of rabies testing.*

Owner Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**For veterinarian or health official:** I have provided the owner with this form and have provided the owner the opportunity to ask questions about the protocols and procedures described.

Veterinarian or Health Official Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*Owner was given form and/or verbal notification of the protocols and procedures to be followed, and was given the opportunity to ask questions, but a signature was unable to be obtained.*

Date and time of notification: \_\_\_\_\_

*Reasonable attempts have been made to contact the owner, but the owner has been unable to be contacted.*

Date and times of notification attempts: \_\_\_\_\_

**The Health Officer or veterinarian should retain this form on file for at least six months. Forms should not be sent to the New Jersey Department of Health.**