



Bureau of State Laboratory Services

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Public Health Preparedness Services*
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May 14, 2009

TO: All Local Animal Control Agencies, Local Health Departments and Rabies Specimen Submitters

FROM: Victor Waddell, Arizona State Health Laboratory Bureau Chief and Elisabeth Lawaczeck, State Public Health Veterinarian

RE: **SUBMISSION OF ANIMAL SPECIMENS TO THE ARIZONA STATE HEALTH LABORATORY FOR RABIES EXAMINATION**

The purpose of this letter is to provide guidance for submitting animal specimens to the Arizona State Health Laboratory (ASHL) for rabies examination.

ASHL provides examinations for animals suspected of having rabies to:

1. Provide information to physicians treating humans for possible rabies exposures¹
2. Provide information to veterinarians and animal owners in determining the cause of death of animals with neurological disease suggestive of rabies,
3. Conduct rabies surveillance among animal species in Arizona that may serve as likely rabies vectors and may require public health intervention.

In the past, ASHL has accepted and tested animal specimens with the single criteria that the specimen is from a mammal capable of transmitting rabies. Due to the closure of ASHL in Flagstaff and Tucson, and additional budget reductions, new restrictions apply. Effective June 1, 2009, ASHL will require that animal specimens meet the following expanded criteria before accepting and testing specimens.

1. Dogs and cats will not be accepted for rabies testing unless the following criteria are met:
 - a. A dog or cat has clear neurologic signs consistent with rabies, as determined by a veterinarian. The veterinarian should try to rule out distemper in dogs by observation for clinical signs consistent with distemper, but not consistent with rabies.
 - b. A quarantine of 10 days of a dog or cat (14 day quarantine for ferrets) could not be completed due to the following:
 - i. The animal is unable to be observed due to injuries or illness severe enough to be considered inhumane to not euthanize prior to completion of quarantine, as documented & approved by the animal control supervisor
 - ii. Clear signs of rabies are present, as determined by a veterinarian or animal control agency supervisor.

If the dog, cat or ferret does not meet these criteria, animal control agencies (and veterinarians if assisting animal control) have the following alternatives: complete the quarantine of the biting animal OR submit the head of the animal to another lab that performs rabies DFA testing for a fee. Please see the attached list of suggested alternate labs.

Submission of a dog, cat, or ferret to ASHL under any other circumstances requires prior notification and approval from the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) (602-364-4562).

2. Horses, cows, and other large livestock must be submitted to the University of Arizona Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (AzVDL) in Tucson. AzVDL provides brain extraction and shipment to ASHL for a fee.
3. Rodents (e.g. squirrels, mice, hamsters, gerbils, rats) and rabbits will not be tested for rabies, due to the non-incidence of rabies in these species in Arizona.
4. Other domestic or wild mammals that are suspected of being rabid, that have bitten or otherwise exposed a human, pet, or livestock, should be submitted as soon as possible.
5. Bats that have been involved in biting or non-bite exposures with humans or animals: Bats found in the living space of human dwellings where people have been sleeping (an individual awakens to find a bat in the room, or an adult observes a bat in a room with an unattended child, or a mentally disabled or intoxicated person), or found in a fenced in yard with a dog or cat may be submitted even though actual exposure cannot be confirmed. Bats found on school grounds can be submitted, even without known contact. Bats found sick, dying, or dead outdoors where there is no known or suspected exposure to humans or domestic animals should not be submitted.
6. Terrestrial species that are known to be rabies vectors in Arizona or in other states (skunks, foxes, raccoons, coyotes, bobcats) whose actions suggest abnormal behavior or central nervous system (CNS) disease may be submitted whether a bite or non-bite exposure to a human or animal has occurred. These animals will be tested for surveillance purposes.

Brain material from animals with CNS disease symptoms may be submitted by veterinarians or veterinary diagnostic laboratories as part of their diagnostic process, regardless of bite or other exposure status.

Submissions to the Laboratory: Animal head submissions should be shipped to ensure that they will arrive on Monday through Friday between the hours of 8:00 A.M. and 4:45 P.M. Specimens cannot be accepted after hours, on weekends, or on State or Federal holidays.

With the exception of bats, no intact animals will be accepted (heads only). Submission guidelines and forms are provided with the Arizona Manual for Rabies Control and Bite Management and on the ADHS rabies webpage at: <http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/oids/vector/rabies>. Specimens must be shipped to the Arizona State Health Laboratory, Attn: Virology, 250 N 17th Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85007.

In Arizona, consultation on the need to conduct testing of individual animals, risk of exposure, and incidence of rabies in animals is available from the Office of Infectious Disease Services at ADHS at 602-364-4562. Physicians and other health care providers may contact their local health department and ADHS after normal business hours, holidays, and weekends to seek consultation.

¹*Rabies is transmitted when the virus is introduced into bite wounds or open cuts in skin or onto mucous membranes. Human Rabies Prevention-United States, 2008; MMWR May 23, 2008, Vol. 57, No. RR-3*

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