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

FROM: Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS), Vector- Borne & Zoonotic Diseases Program

RE: SUBMISSION OF ANIMAL SPECIMENS FOR RABIES EXAMINATION

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

ASPHL provides examinations for animal suspected of having rabies in order to:

1. Provide results to physicians that are treating humans for possible rabies exposures
2. Provide results to veterinarians or animal control agencies that submitted an animal that was suspected of having rabies, and
3. Conduct rabies surveillance among animal species in Arizona that may serve as likely reservoirs and may require public health intervention.

As of June 1, 2009, a new protocol was issued in order to decrease the number of domestic animal specimens being tested at the ASPHL. Due to further reductions in laboratory capacity, it is necessary to update the protocol. Effective June 1, 2011, ASPHL will require that animal specimens meet the following expanded criteria:

All domestic animal specimens must have pre-approval by the appropriate public health agency. This is usually done at ADHS, however, first review of specimens may be delegated to the epidemiology staff at a local health department after they have been given training by ADHS. At present, only Maricopa County Department of Public Health has received this training. Please contact Maricopa County Epidemiology if your specimen was collected in that jurisdiction, otherwise contact VBZD at (602) 364-4562 or vbzd@azdhs.gov. Final authority to approve submission for testing rests with the ADHS Vector-Borne and Zoonotic Disease Program.

1. Dog, cat and ferret specimens will only be accepted for rabies testing if:
   a. The animal had signs consistent with rabies, as determined by a veterinarian or ADHS staff AND
   b. The animal was unable to complete the ten day quarantine because the animal was severely injured or ill as determined by a veterinarian or animal control agency supervisor.

2. If the animal does not meet the criteria above, veterinarians and animal control agencies have the following alternatives:
   a. Complete the quarantine of the biting animal or
   b. Submit the head of the animal to another laboratory that performs rabies Direct Fluorescent Antibody (DFA) testing. The following laboratories provide rabies DFA testing for animals. Prior to submission, please contact the laboratory to obtain their respective submission form, instructions, and fees.
      i. Colorado State University Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory
      ii. Colorado Department of Public Health Laboratory Services Division
      iii. Oregon State University Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory

3. Horses, cows, and other large livestock must have brain extractions done before being submitted to the ASPHL. Brain extractions can be performed by the University of Arizona Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory in Tucson or by a qualified veterinarian.

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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
2 Ferrets must be quarantined for 14 days.
4. Rodents (e.g. squirrels, mice, hamsters, gerbils, rats) and rabbits will not be tested for rabies.
5. Wild mammals that are suspected of being rabid and have bitten or otherwise exposed a human, pet or livestock, should be submitted to ASPHL as soon as possible.
6. Bats found in living space of human dwellings, found in a fenced yard where a domestic animals may have been exposed, or found on school grounds should be submitted. Confirmation of exposure is not required.
7. Sick, dying or dead bats found outdoors, where there is no known exposure, should not be submitted.
8. Terrestrial species that are known to be rabies vectors (skunks, foxes, coyotes, bobcats) and that exhibited abnormal behavior may be submitted. Where there are no human or animal exposures, animal heads should be tested via dRIT by the USDA Wildlife Services.

Submission to Arizona State Public Health Laboratory

1. Specimens will be accepted Monday through Friday between the hours of 8:00am and 4:45pm. Specimens cannot be accepted after hours, on weekends, or on holidays.
2. Intact animals will not be accepted, except for bats. Please only submit animal heads.