

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREPARING, PACKAGING & SHIPPING RABIES SPECIMENS

RABIES KITS 10 & 12

All specimens submitted to the Vermont Department of Health Laboratory for rabies diagnostic testing **must be pre-approved** by calling the Vermont Department of Health Epidemiology Program at **1-800-640-4374** or **802-863-7240**. Test results are usually available within 24-48 hours of receipt.

Vermont Department of Health Laboratory hours are Monday-Friday 7:45am-4:30pm, except for state holidays. If submission of specimens is necessary after the Laboratory is closed, please call the Epidemiology Program to make arrangements. Only specific human exposure cases may be approved for testing on weekends and holidays.

Testing may not be possible if the head of the animal has been damaged or is badly decomposed.

RABIES KITS

Rabies kits can be obtained from the Vermont Department of Health Laboratory. Many State Police barracks and Vermont Department of Health District Offices also have kits on hand. Please call ahead to inquire.

Kit 10 – Whole Animal Carcass or Animal Head Kit contains:

- 1 thick black or blue plastic bag in which to place the animal specimen
- 1 clear plastic bag in which to place the bagged specimen
- 2 pieces of filament tape for preparing the carton for shipping
- 6 polyfoam panels and plastic bag which line the cardboard shipping container
- 2 unfrozen 20-ounce ice packs (store frozen until needed)
- 1 Rabies Request for Examination requisition form
- 1 envelope addressed to the Vermont Department of Health Laboratory

Kit 12 – Small Animal or Livestock Brain Tissue Kit contains:

- 1 clear, plastic zip lock bag
- 1 plastic zip lock Biohazard bag
- 1 insulated cardboard shipping box
- 1 unfrozen 20-ounce ice pack (store frozen until needed)
- 1 Rabies Request for Examination requisition form
- 1 envelope addressed to the Vermont Department of Health Laboratory

PREPARING SPECIMENS FOR RABIES TESTING

Do not submit live animals. Animals must be humanely euthanized prior to shipment. Handle all specimens with disposable gloves.

Specimens should be kept refrigerated until shipment. Freezing may damage the brain tissue, compromise the test and/or delay testing.

Determine which test kit is needed for each specimen:

Kit 10 – Whole Animal Carcass or Animal Head Kit

- Wild animals (raccoons, foxes, skunks, etc.)
- Heads of small livestock (sheep, goats, pigs, etc.)
- Domestic pets (dogs, cats)

Kit 12 – Small Animal or Livestock Brain Tissue Kit

- Bats
- Small rodents
- Brain samples from large livestock (cows, horses)
- Heads of small wild or domestic animals (skunks, cats, dogs, etc.)

Bats: whole bodies are acceptable.

Small rodents: whole bodies or heads are acceptable.

Domestic pets and small livestock (sheep, goats, pigs, dogs, cats, etc.): submit entire head or brain only. A qualified person shall separate the animal head from the body as soon as possible after death, prior to submission to the laboratory. Whole carcasses are acceptable if they fit into the rabies box. Domestic animal remains may be returned to owners only if the test is negative for rabies and the owner picks up the remains directly from the Laboratory. Please notify the Epidemiology Program if return of domestic animal remains is requested.

Large livestock (cows, horses): brain tissue (brainstem and cerebellum via the foramen magnum) is acceptable. Samples of all three lobes of the cerebellum and a complete cross-section of the brainstem are required. Removal of brain sections should be performed by a veterinarian. Avoid brain tissue damage as it may compromise the test.

Wild animals (raccoons, foxes, woodchucks, etc.): whole carcasses are acceptable if they fit into the rabies box. Only submit the head of animals that do not fit in the box.

Skunks: Submit head only. Whole bodies must be deodorized prior to submission by submerging the whole animal in a mixture of 1 qt. peroxide, ¼ c. baking soda, and 1 tsp. liquid soap.

PACKAGING SPECIMENS FOR RABIES TESTING

1. Only specimens from one animal should be placed in each box.

2. If two specimens must be placed in the same box (e.g., two bats):
 - a. Fill out a separate Rabies Request for Examination form for each specimen and clearly label each specimen.
 - b. Under the “Animal Information” section on the Request for Rabies Examination form, check “yes” under “More than One Specimen in Box?”
 - c. Mark in large letters on the outside of the box the number of specimens in the box.
3. Do not overstuff the shipping box.
4. The specimen must be placed into the thick, black or blue plastic bag (Kit 10) or into the clear zip lock bag (Kit 12). Twist and tightly knot the top of the bag or seal the zip lock bag to prevent leaks.
5. Place the bag inside the clear plastic bag that lines the inside of the insulated cardboard box (Kit 10) or inside the biohazard zip lock bag and into the insulated cardboard shipping box (Kit 12). Place the frozen ice packs on top of the plastic bag containing the specimen. Twist and tightly knot the top of the clear plastic bag or seal the zip lock bag to prevent leaks.
6. Place the polyfoam lid on top of the side panels and close the top of the cardboard box completely. Tightly seal the top of the box with tape.
7. Fill out the Rabies Request for Examination form completely.
8. Place the form in the self-addressed envelope and seal. Attach the envelope to the top of the shipping box. **Do not place the envelope inside the box.** Department of Transportation regulations state the “UN3373 Biological Substances, Category B” label located on the envelope must be displayed for all rabies submissions during transport to the Laboratory.
9. If there is not an official rabies submission kit available, specimens can be packed in double plastic bags with cold packs (never ice cubes) and placed in a cardboard box, preferably with Styrofoam insulation. Fill out a Request for [Rabies Examination form](#) for each specimen, place in an envelope, and tape it to the outside of the box. It is essential that the outside of the box is clearly marked with “Rabies Specimen,” along with the address of the Laboratory:

Vermont Department of Health Lab – Rabies Lab
359 South Park Drive
Colchester, VT 05446

SHIPPING SPECIMENS FOR RABIES TESTING

Prior arrangements must be made through the Epidemiology Program.

- Rabies specimens **should not** be shipped by U.S. Mail or UPS.
- Rabies specimens must be delivered to the laboratory by the fastest means possible and may be shipped in one of four ways:
 - Delivered directly to the Laboratory by submitter
 - Delivered by the University of Vermont Medical Center Courier Service (through a local hospital)
 - Shipped by FedEx at the submitter's expense

For comments or questions about packaging and shipping specimens, call the Department of Health Laboratory at 802-338-4724 or 800-660-9997 (toll-free in Vermont).

For questions about whether to submit specimens for rabies testing, please call the Epidemiology Program or the Rabies Hotline at 1-800-4-RABIES.