

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, closed on 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 will be approved for testing on weekends and holidays with prior approval by VDH Epidemiology.

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

RABIES KIT CONTENTS

Rabies kits can be obtained from the Vermont Department of Health Laboratory by calling (802) 338-4724 or (800) 660-9997. Many State Police barracks and Vermont Department of Health District Offices have kits on hand. Please call ahead to inquire.

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

- 1 thick black plastic bag to place the animal specimen in
- 1 clear plastic bag to place the black/blue specimen bag in
- 2 pieces of filament tape to prepare the carton for shipping
- 6 polyfoam panels and plastic bag to line the cardboard shipping container
- 2 unfrozen 20-ounce ice packs (store frozen until needed)
- 1 Rabies Request for Examination requisition form (Micro 201)
- 1 envelope addressed to the Vermont Department of Health Laboratory for the requisition form

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

- 1 clear, plastic zip lock bag to place the specimen in
- 1 plastic zip lock Biohazard bag to place the specimen bag in
- 1 insulated cardboard shipping box
- 1 unfrozen 20-ounce ice pack (store frozen until needed)
- 1 Rabies Request for Examination requisition form (Micro 201)
- 1 envelope addressed to the Vermont Department of Health Laboratory for the requisition form

PREPARING SPECIMENS FOR RABIES TESTING

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

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

- Whole carcass of small wild animals (bats, rodents, etc.)
- Heads of small livestock (sheep, goats, pigs, etc.); brain tissue of livestock is preferred over whole heads
- Heads of wild animals (raccoons, skunks, foxes, etc.)
- Heads of domestic pets

Kit 12 – Small Animal or Livestock Brain Tissue Kit

Brain tissue should be removed by a professional, the full cerebellum and brain stem are required.

Brain tissue is accepted from:

- Large livestock (cows, horses)
- Wild animals (raccoons, skunks, foxes, etc.)
- Domestic pets

Bats: whole bodies are acceptable. (Kit 12)

Small rodents: whole bodies or heads are acceptable. (Kit 12)

Domestic pets and small livestock (sheep, goats, pigs, dogs, cats, etc.): submit entire head or if submitting brain tissue, submit the full cerebellum and the full brainstem. A complete cross section of the brainstem is required. A qualified person must separate the animal head from the body as soon as possible after death, prior to submission to the laboratory. Please notify the Epidemiology Program if you want domestic animal remains returned. 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. (Kit 10 for whole head submission, Kit 12 for brain tissue submission)

Large livestock (cows, horses): submit brain tissue (brainstem and cerebellum via the foramen magnum) only. The full 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. (Kit 12)

Wild animals (raccoons, foxes, woodchucks, etc.): Submit heads only whenever possible. Whole carcasses are acceptable if they fit into the rabies box. (Kit 10)

Skunks: Submit head only. (Kit 10)

2

PACKAGING SPECIMENS FOR RABIES TESTING

1. Only specimens from one animal should be placed in each box. Do not send specimens with maggots, they will be rejected.
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 (Micro-201) for each specimen and clearly label each specimen. Specimens with embedded quills must have the appropriate box checked on the form.
 - 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:
 - a. (Kit 10) into a thick black or clear plastic bag. Twist and tightly knot the top of the bag.
 - b. (Kit 12) into the clear zip lock bag and seal the zip lock bag to prevent leaks.
5. Place the bag with the specimen inside:
 - a. (Kit 10) the clear plastic bag that lines the inside of the insulated cardboard box. Twist and tightly knot the top of the clear plastic bag.
 - b. (Kit 12) the biohazard zip lock bag and seal it. Place the biohazard bag into the insulated cardboard shipping box.
6. Place the frozen ice packs on top of the plastic bag containing the specimen.
7. Place the polyfoam lid on top of the side panels, secure the plastic bag around the foam, and close the top of the cardboard box completely. Tightly seal the top of the box with tape.
8. Fill out the Rabies Request for Examination form completely.
9. 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.
10. 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](#) (Micro-201) for each specimen, place it in an envelope, and tape it to the outside of the box. It is essential that the outside of the box is clearly marked “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 three 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 Express 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, call the Epidemiology Program or the Rabies Hotline at 1-800-4-RABIES.