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To: Local Health Departments, Animal Control Agencies, Veterinarians and IDPH Regional Offices

From: IDPH State Public Health Veterinarian

Date: June 3, 2025

Subject: Animal Rabies Testing Guidance

Rabies is a fatal but preventable viral disease that poses a serious public health risk when transmitted from animals to humans. Prompt and accurate testing of animals suspected of rabies exposure is critical to ensure timely evaluation for post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and to prevent unnecessary treatment when risk is low.

To support consistent and efficient rabies surveillance across the state, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is sharing updated guidance on which animal specimens are eligible for rabies testing at IDPH laboratories, which must be directed to the University of Illinois Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (VDL), and how to properly collect and submit specimens.

Please review the updated guidance carefully and share it with your colleagues, veterinary partners, and animal control staff to help ensure Illinois residents receive timely and appropriate care when potential rabies exposure occurs.

Four Illinois laboratories perform animal rabies testing:

- IDPH Carbondale Laboratory: 1155 S Oakland St, Carbondale, IL 62902-2797. (618) 457-5131
- IDPH Springfield Laboratory: 825 N Rutledge St., Springfield IL 62794-9435. (217) 782-6562
- IDPH Chicago Laboratory: 2121 W Taylor St, Chicago IL 60612. (312) 793-4746
- Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory - University of Illinois, College of Veterinary Medicine
2001 S. Lincoln Ave., Urbana IL 61802. (217) 333-1620

The VDL has fee-based testing payable by the submitter on any mammals submitted. Small rodents and rabbits and large animals such as horses, cattle, deer, goats and sheep must always go the VDL.

IDPH labs only test the following specimens:

- High-risk species – exposed a person via a bite or saliva entering wound/mucous membrane
 - Bat, raccoon, skunk, fox, coyote, ground hog
 - Neurologic animals not listed above**
- Bats
 - Found in same room with a sleeping person
 - Physical contact with a person such that a bite cannot be ruled out
 - Present in an area with a pet, small child, person with cognitive impairment, or intoxicated person who cannot attest to their type of interaction
 - Present in a home with individuals whose anxiety may lead to unnecessary PEP if the bat is not tested

- Dog, cat, or ferret:
 - All dogs, cats or ferrets must be confined for 10 days after they have bitten a person. Therefore, these animals cannot be submitted for testing unless:
 - They do not survive the 10-day confinement
 - They develop signs of rabies during the 10-day confinement
 - The bite is unprovoked (unexpected)**
 - The following are examples of provoked (expected bites)
 - Moving past animal on a bike, skateboard or running,
 - Taking food away from the animal,
 - Handling for veterinary or grooming interactions,
 - Getting between two animals fighting
 - Or many other possible scenarios
- Unique situations**, including bites from other species and other special circumstances
****Requires approval from local or state public health communicable disease personnel.**

Rabies testing requisition, and specimen collection, storage, and shipment:

Rapid and accurate diagnosis of rabies in animals is essential for appropriate and timely administration of post-exposure prophylaxis to humans. Testing for rabies requires an intact brain that has not been traumatized (e.g. smashed, shot) and is in good condition (i.e. not putrefied or dried out).

- Submit only the head of animals at the IDPH laboratories (e.g., skunks, raccoons, dogs, cats). It is acceptable to submit the whole carcass only from bats.
- Live animals are not accepted - please confirm all animals, including bats are deceased.
- Specimens must be refrigerated and delivered on ice packs. In rare cases of shipping delay, specimens can be frozen, but this is not preferred and can delay testing. Do not freeze bats.
- Specimens must be accompanied by a submission form (printed from ETOR; see below) and shipped overnight (to maintain temperature) or hand delivered during business hours M-F.
- Please package specimens in a professional manner — reasonably dry and double-bagged in opaque, leak-proof packaging.
- Very rarely, and only with prior approval by select IDPH Communicable Disease staff members, specimens may be approved for emergency testing outside of normal business hours.

New mandatory rabies requisition process (ETOR) launched on 06/02/25

The IDPH Division of Laboratories is transitioning to the online **Electronic Test Ordering and Results (ETOR)** portal for all rabies testing submissions. The ETOR platform will provide submitters online access to test results.

New users must enroll with the ETOR Portal to submit rabies test orders. Each person that orders rabies tests in your facility must have their own unique login. New users should complete the registration form at: <https://prod.labwebportal.com/il/> using an email related to their facility.

Please share this memo with your animal control partners and veterinarians. Thank you for helping keep our public health laboratory services free in high-risk situations by following these guidelines.