



State Hygienic Laboratory

at the University of Iowa

Rabies Testing

Specimen Collection and Shipping Instructions



For questions determining human exposure, or in cases where a physician or veterinarian are not available, please contact Iowa Health and Human Services – Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology (CADE), 1-800-362-2736

Submission Requirements

1. Call the laboratory prior to delivery during normal business hours to allow personnel to prepare for the specimen's arrival. Phone: (319) 335-4335
Normal Business Hours are Monday–Friday, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm, Saturday 9:00 am – 12:00 pm. Samples are not accepted outside of normal business hours.
 - For urgent questions outside of normal business hours, call 319-335-4500 or 800-421-IOWA and ask to be connected with Rabies on-call staff.
2. **DO NOT** leave any animal specimen at the laboratory without handing it directly to an employee.
3. A **COMPLETED Rabies Test Request Form** must accompany the specimen to ensure proper specimen identification and tracking.
4. Although your local hospital sends specimens to SHL, they may not accept animals for submission. Please call your hospital laboratory before bringing in animal specimens for transport to SHL.
5. For animals, the brain and brainstem are the preferred samples. Whole bodies of small animals, under 1 lb. are acceptable. See page 2 for more detail.
6. Double (or triple) bag the specimen using two plastic bags or liners, ensuring each bag is sealed tightly to prevent leaking. Place the sealed specimen bag inside a hard sided container to prevent damage to the specimen. Attach the completed Rabies Test Request Form to the hard sided container.

Store the packaged specimens in the refrigerator until shipped. Specimens should be transported to SHL on cold packs, NOT frozen, within 24 hours.

Test Request Form

1. Complete the **Rabies Test Request Form** by going online to: <http://www.shl.uiowa.edu/>
2. Select the green button labeled “Clinical Test Request Forms”
3. In Step 1 of the on-line TRF generator, select “Rabies” for the test request form template.
4. For Step 2, scroll through the alphabetical list of Organizations to find and select your facility. If your facility is not listed, contact SHL.
5. Step 3 will be to click the "Submit" button, generating a fillable PDF version of the Test Request Form. (Print when completed.)
6. Testing is reliant on a complete and accurate Test Request Form. Processing the specimen and results may be delayed if information is not correct or provided.
7. **The following MUST be included as required by regulatory agencies and SHL:**
 - a. Type of Animal (i.e. cat, dog, bat)
 - b. Name/age of persons exposed and/or owner (*If person exposed is a minor, contact information is needed for the legal guardian.*)
 - c. Name, address, and **24-hour phone number** for a veterinarian, physician, or public health practitioner
 - d. Results WILL NOT be provided directly to the patient, guardian, or animal owner. They will only be released to the veterinarian, physician, or public health practitioner.
 - e. Complete the section at the very bottom of the Test Request Form if you would like the results mailed to a second organization (such as your doctor's office or hospital, in addition to your veterinarian.)
8. Only one specimen submission corresponds to one test request form. If submitting multiple samples, ensure adequate means of affixing each test request form to the corresponding specimen submission.
9. To help maintain the integrity of the Test Request Form, placing it in a separate plastic bag or liner will help ensure the form is not damaged during transport and shipping.



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Specimen Collection and Handling

Small animals <1 lb. (mice, rats, bats, etc.)

Only small intact animals are acceptable for rabies testing. Attempting to remove the head of an animal this small may compromise the integrity of the brain material, rendering the specimen unsatisfactory for testing. Technicians **MUST** be able to identify specific brain anatomy for accurate testing.

Bats Only:

- If the bat is presumed dead, always take caution in the case the bat is merely stunned. Take care to not crush the skull. A damaged brain may render the specimen unsatisfactory for testing. If you are unsure about the condition of the brain, continue with submission. The technologist will be able to make a final determination on the acceptability of the bat for testing.
- If the bat is alive, guard yourself from any potential bite as you place the bat into a hard-sided container. Take the animal to your local vet to have it euthanized and shipped for testing. If you want to avoid fees associated with veterinarian euthanization and shipment, you can hand deliver the live bat to the State Hygienic Laboratory, and we will euthanize and test the bat at nocost.

For all small animal submissions other than live bats, double bag the specimen and place it inside a hard-sided or Styrofoam box. Keep the specimen cool with ice packs surrounding the double bagged specimen. **DO NOT FREEZE** or have ice directly on the specimen. Be sure to secure the lid tightly to the box.

Medium to Large Animals >1 lb. (cats, dogs, cows, horses, etc.)

1. The brain and brain stem are preferred. At a veterinary facility, have the head, brain, and brain stem removed. Attempting to improperly remove a head may compromise the integrity of the brain material, rendering the specimen unsatisfactory for testing. Technicians **MUST** be able to identify specific brain anatomy for accurate testing. The lab is not equipped for large animal disposal.
2. **TRIPLE** bag the specimen (head) and make sure each of the three bags are securely closed to prevent leakage.
3. Place the triple-bagged specimen into a hard-sided or Styrofoam box and secure the lid. Keep the specimen cool with ice packs surrounding the bagged specimen. **DO NOT FREEZE** or have ice directly on the specimen. Be sure to secure the lid tightly to the box to prevent damage during shipping.

Cow and horses heads only

1. If you are unable to find a hard-sided or Styrofoam box large enough to hold the head, please ensure that any bags used for transport are of sufficient strength and size to hold the head.
2. Allow the head to drain sufficiently prior to packaging. Ensure that the bag containing the head has absorbent material inside to absorb any fluids that may leak during transport.
3. If there are bones or other sharp portions protruding from the head, make sure they are adequately wrapped or padded in order keep them from puncturing the bags.
4. The outermost bag or container must contain enough freezer packs to keep the head cold during transport.



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Shipping Instructions for all samples

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2. Normal Business Hours are Monday – Friday, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm, Saturday 9:00 am – 12:00 pm. Samples are not accepted outside of normal business hours.
3. For urgent questions outside of normal business hours, call 319-335-4500 or 800-421-IOWA and ask to be connected with Rabies on-call staff.
4. DO NOT leave any animal specimen at the laboratory without handing it directly to an employee.
5. A COMPLETED Rabies Test Request Form must accompany the specimen to ensure proper specimen identification and tracking. (Placing the form in a separate plastic bag or liner may help to prevent it from becoming damaged or contaminated.)
6. Although your local hospital sends specimens to SHL, they may not accept animals for submission. Please call your hospital laboratory before bringing in animal specimens for transport to SHL.
7. Double (or triple) bag the specimen using two plastic bags or liners, ensuring each bag is sealed tightly to prevent leaking. *CAUTION* An improperly packed or shipped animal may compromise the integrity of the brain material, rendering the specimen unsatisfactory for testing. **Store specimens in the refrigerator until shipped.** Specimens should be shipped **on cold packs**, NOT frozen, within 24 hours.
8. Place the sealed specimen bag inside a hard sided container to prevent damage to the specimen. Attach the completed Rabies Test Request Form to the hard sided container.
9. A Private vehicle is the most efficient means of delivery to the lab.
10. If you must use a commercial courier service (FedEx or UPS), keep the bagged animal cool using ice packs inside another shipping container and place the bagged test request form in the outermost shipper.
11. If shipping via overnight courier, ensure next day delivery and use shipment tracking. If the animal does not arrive at SHL the next day, you will be responsible to track it.
12. If you are shipping on Friday for Saturday delivery, you **MUST** request guaranteed Saturday morning delivery. If you do not specifically request this, the delivery can be delayed until the next available workday (i.e., Monday, or Tuesday if Monday is a holiday.)
13. Delayed delivery may compromise the integrity of the brain material and render the specimen unsatisfactory for testing.

Contact Information

For Rabies testing questions or concerns: 319-335-4500 or toll free: 800-421-IOWA