

## **Changes to Rabies Testing Protocols for *Human Exposure Cases* in Pennsylvania (10-17-2017)**

Dear Veterinary Colleagues and Animal Health Partners:

This letter is in follow-up to an earlier memo you may have received from the Bureau of Laboratories (BOL). The Bureau of Laboratories (BOL) operates the state public health lab (in Exton, PA), and regulates clinical laboratories that serve the citizens of Pennsylvania. Most of the testing done at BOL is coordinated through the Department of Health's (DOH) State Health Centers, epidemiologists, individual public health programs or local health departments and is not available to the general public. For more information on BOL please see:

[http://www.health.pa.gov/Your-Department-of-Health/Offices%20and%20Bureaus/Laboratories/Pages/default.aspx#.WeYx7Z3D\\_4h](http://www.health.pa.gov/Your-Department-of-Health/Offices%20and%20Bureaus/Laboratories/Pages/default.aspx#.WeYx7Z3D_4h)

The following is guidance the PA Department of Agriculture (PDA) regional offices have received regarding **human exposure** samples (potentially rabid animals that have exposed only humans):

- **There is no longer a courier service available from the state agency regional offices to the DOH lab in Exton.** BOL has discontinued funding for this service. **Please do not advise your clients to take their human exposure samples to the PDA regional office.** Samples may be delivered to the DOH lab by the following methods:
  1. Hand delivery to the lab during normal hours of operation
  2. Shipment from a private veterinary practice using the Quick Courier service
  3. Shipment from a private veterinary practice using overnight FedEx or UPS (do not use the US Postal Service – they cannot guarantee overnight delivery)
  4. Shipment by the bite victim (after proper sample preparation and packaging) using overnight FedEx or UPS

\*In all cases, the bite victim will incur the cost of delivery, but the rabies lab test will continue to be provided for free.
- **Animal bites should be reported to the local health authority,** but not all animals must be submitted for rabies testing. While some wildlife species are common rabies vectors (raccoons, skunks, foxes, bats, groundhogs, etc.), not all wildlife species are high rabies risks. For example, small rodents and lagomorphs rarely need to be tested for rabies. **Check with your local DOH office for prior approval if you are unsure regarding low risk species for human exposure rabies testing.** Samples sent to the DOH lab for which testing is deemed unnecessary may be discarded at their discretion.

- **Contact numbers for the State DOH Health Centers can be found at:**  
<http://www.health.pa.gov/Your-Department-of-Health/Offices%20and%20Bureaus/State%20Health%20Centers/Pages/default.aspx#.WeEG5J3D9Mt>
- What constitutes exposure? **It is up to the DOH to determine if exposure has occurred.**  
 Examples may include:
  1. A bite has been inflicted by any **wildlife**.
  2. A **suspect animal's** saliva makes contact with a fresh open wound or a mucus membrane such as the eyes, nose or mouth.
  3. A **suspect animal** inflicts scratches.
  4. A **bat** was known to be present in a room with a sleeping person, a previously unattended child, mentally disabled person, or intoxicated person.
- As a reminder, BOL does not except entire carcasses for testing - only heads. Please see BOL's submission guidelines for complete information. As always, BOL is not able to process large animal heads (cows, horses, etc.). **Large animal heads may be submitted to the Animal Diagnostic Lab at Penn State or the Pennsylvania Veterinary Laboratory in Harrisburg for human and/or animal exposure cases.**
- For domestic animal bite cases, if the domestic animal is clinically normal (NOT a rabies suspect), a 10-day period of observation should be utilized vs. euthanasia/testing, unless DOH advises otherwise. **If a domestic animal is a rabies suspect (animal exhibiting clinical signs of rabies), PDA should be notified as this is a reportable disease. If the domestic animal has bitten a person within the past 10 days, the law requires the animal to be euthanized and tested.**
- Non-human exposure samples (animals that have bitten other animals) may still be shipped from the PDA regional offices free of charge.

We are sorry for any inconvenience this new policy will cause. We would all prefer these services to continue, but that is not possible considering the financial reality of the Commonwealth at this time. If any additional changes occur, we will share that information.

Please feel free to contact me with questions. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

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