



Department of Health

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To better provide rabies testing services, the New York State Department of Health has made two key changes to the requirements for specimen delivery to the Rabies Laboratory.

- **Specimens must be shipped so that they are guaranteed to arrive at the laboratory within one day after shipment.**
- **For emergency testing on a Saturday, please select the 'early Saturday morning delivery' option.**

In addition, please note the following continuing guidance:

- Do not ship specimens for emergency testing on Saturdays without obtaining prior approval for weekend testing from the Bureau of Communicable Disease Control (BCDC).
- Any specimens received for which approval for emergency testing was not given will be held for testing on the next business day.
- Properly packaged specimens should be shipped to the Wadsworth Center Rabies Laboratory at this address:
Griffin Laboratory
Wadsworth Center
NYS Department of Health
5668 State Farm Road
Slingerlands, NY 12159
- When specimens are being prepared for emergency testing on Saturdays, the local health department should verify that 'early Saturday AM delivery' is requested and obtain a tracking number for all specimens.
- Local health departments can continue to send in specimens that will be delivered to the laboratory on Saturday but that do not require weekend testing. These specimens should have printed on the outside of the shipping container "For Saturday Delivery, Non-Emergency".

A delay in specimen delivery can result in specimen decomposition, unsatisfactory testing results, delays or unnecessary post-exposure prophylaxis and/or unnecessary quarantine of companion animals.



Summary of emergency animal rabies testing policy

1. Emergency/off-hours rabies testing of animals must be reviewed and approved by BCDC either during normal business hours at (518) 473-4439, or after hours through the NYSDOH Duty Officer at (866) 881-2809.
2. After consultation with BCDC, if off-hours testing is approved, the local health department must immediately notify the rabies laboratory at (518) 485-6464 during business hours, or after hours through the NYSDOH Duty Officer system at (866) 881-2809. Immediate notification of the rabies laboratory is necessary to:
 - Ensure that rabies lab technologists are available to receive and test the specimen.
 - Verify appropriate shipping will be requested so that the specimen will arrive in a timely manner.
 - Confirm to whom and how emergency testing results will be reported.
3. Emergency rabies testing is indicated for an animal that has ***bitten a human and is highly suspect for rabies infection*** based on species, behavior, and circumstances of the incident. Emergency testing is reserved for situations where, due to timing around weekends or holidays, it may not be possible to have the results of testing back within 3 days of the date of the exposure incident.

Some examples of incidents that should be considered for emergency testing would include:

- A bite, or significant saliva exposure to an open wound, from abnormal acting raccoon, skunk, or fox.
- A bite or other **direct contact** where a bite cannot be ruled out involving a bat (note that a bat found with a sleeping person with no known direct contact must still be tested, but would not be considered for emergency testing).
- A known bite from domestic animal that has been examined by a veterinarian and determined to be showing signs consistent with rabies.

The rabies specimen submission policy can be found on the Rabies Laboratory website at <http://www.wadsworth.org/programs/id/rabies/animal-specimen-testing>.