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State Health Commissioner

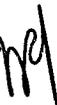


Indiana State Department of Health

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October 24, 2008

TO: All Local Health Departments and Rabies Specimen Submitters

FROM: Lance Rhodes
Chief of Staff 

SUBJECT: Submission of Animal Specimens to the Indiana State
Department of Health Laboratory for Rabies Examination

The purpose of this letter is to provide guidance for submitting animal specimens to the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) Laboratory for rabies examination.

The ISDH Rabies Laboratory provides examinations for animals suspected of having rabies to:

1. Provide information to physicians treating humans for animal bites or non-bite exposures¹,
2. Provide information to veterinarians and animal owners in determining the cause of death of animals with neurological disease,
3. Conduct rabies surveillance among animal species that may serve as likely rabies vectors in Indiana.

In the past, the ISDH Rabies Laboratory has accepted and tested animal specimens with the single criteria that the specimen is from a mammal capable of transmitting rabies. Effective December 1, 2008, the ISDH Rabies Laboratory will require that animal specimens meet the following expanded criteria before accepting and testing specimens.

1. Any animal that has bitten or otherwise exposed a human, pet, or livestock: Observation of dogs, cats, and ferrets is required for 10 days unless the animal is unable to be observed due to injuries or illness at the time of the incident, or if the animal becomes ill during the observation period. Submission of a dog, cat, or ferret under any other circumstances requires prior notification and approval from the ISDH Veterinary Epidemiologist at 317.233.7125. Other domestic or wild animals that are suspected of being rabid, that have bitten or otherwise exposed a human, pet, or livestock, should be submitted as soon as possible.

¹ Rabies is transmitted when the virus is introduced into bite wounds or open cuts in skin or onto mucous membranes. Human Rabies Prevention-United States, 2008; MMWR May 23, 2008, Vol. 57, No. RR-3

2. Bats that have been involved in biting or non-bite exposures with humans or animals: Bats found in the living space of human dwellings where people have been sleeping (an individual awakens to find a bat in the room, or an adult observes a bat in a room with an unattended child, or a mentally disabled or intoxicated person) may be submitted even though actual exposure cannot be confirmed. Bats found sick, dying, or dead outdoors where there is no known or suspected exposure to humans or domestic animals should not be submitted.
3. Terrestrial species that are known to be rabies vectors in Indiana or in other states (skunks, foxes, raccoons, coyotes) whose actions suggest abnormal behavior or central nervous system (CNS) diseases may be submitted whether a bite or non-bite exposure to a human or animal has occurred. These animals will be tested for surveillance purposes. Squirrels, mice, hamsters, gerbils, rats, or other animals that have a very low or non-incidence of rabies will not be tested without the prior approval of the ISDH Laboratory Director or the ISDH Veterinary Epidemiologist.
4. Brain material from animals with CNS disease symptoms may be submitted by veterinarians or veterinary diagnostic laboratories as part of their diagnostic process, regardless of bite or other exposure status.
5. Submissions to the Laboratory: Animal head submissions should be shipped to ensure that they will arrive on Monday through Friday between the hours of 8:30 A.M. and 4:45 P.M., Indianapolis time. Specimens cannot be accepted after hours, on weekends, or on State and Federal holidays. With the exception of bats, no intact animals will be accepted (heads only). Shipping instructions are provided with the Rabies Examination form, State Form 37763. Heads should not be frozen (refrigerated only), as freezing delays testing and damages tissue. Specimens must be shipped to the Rabies Laboratory, Indiana State Department of Health Laboratories, 550 West 16th Street, Suite B, Indianapolis Indiana 46202.

In Indiana, consultation on the need to conduct testing of individual animals, risk of exposure, and incidence of rabies in animals is available from the ISDH Veterinary Epidemiologist, James F. Howell, at 317.233.7125; or other staff in the Communicable Disease Section of the ISDH Epidemiology Resource Center at 317.233.7125. Physicians and other health care providers may contact the ISDH Duty Officer at 317.233.1325 after normal business hours, holidays, and weekends to seek consultation.

cc: Judith A. Monroe, M.D.
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