

STATE OF COLORADO

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Dedicated to protecting and improving the health and environment of the people of Colorado

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Colorado Department
of Public Health
and Environment

Skunk Surveillance 2009 Guidelines for the handling and submission of skunks March 25, 2009

BACKGROUND: Skunk rabies appears to have become reestablished in eastern areas of the state and potentially is moving west toward the Front Range. The establishment of endemic rabies in a terrestrial wildlife reservoir, especially in the urban Front Range, would have enormous public health repercussions. **CDPHE will be conducting limited skunk rabies surveillance in eastern Colorado and has the ability to pay for a small number of rabies tests. However, due to the very limited funds available, the criteria for specimens that CDPHE can pay for have been tightened.**

CRITERIA FOR RABIES TESTING PAID FOR BY CDPHE:

- **Preapproval by CDPHE is required. Specimens submitted and tested without pre-approval will be billed to the submitting agency.** Contact Janell Kenfield at 303-692-2778 for approval.
- Specimens must have the head and skull intact, without the presence of maggots or advanced decay.
- Acceptable specimens are a skunk in contact with domestic animals or people OR a skunk exhibiting strange behavior: out during daytime, attacking animals or inanimate objects, aggressive, motor control problems.
- Due to funding limitations, testing of roadkill cannot be supported this year.
- CDPHE will continue to cover the cost of head removal by a local veterinarian for specimens approved for testing. The veterinarian or local public health agency should submit an invoice to CDPHE.
- All specimens must be submitted to the CDPHE lab for testing.
- Specimens not approved for testing by CDPHE can still be submitted, however the submitting agency will be billed for the test (\$65).

HANDLING SUSPECTED CARCASSES: When collecting or handling animals suspected of having rabies, your personal safety and well-being is the primary concern. **DO NOT transport live wildlife suspected of having rabies.**

- Approach animal carefully and confirm it has expired.
- Do not shoot it in the head. If the animal has to be euthanized, allow animal control, police, sheriff or wildlife officer or a veterinarian to do this for you. Use a body mass shot.
- Use appropriate protective equipment to avoid getting the animal fluids onto your clothing, eyes, nose or mouth. At a minimum this means impervious latex or rubber gloves while handling the carcass or removing the head in the field. A face shield is recommended if splash back while removing the head could occur.
- Place the carcass or head into plastic bag and use a heavy cardboard box and/or cooler to transport to the contracted veterinarian in your county for head removal and carcass disposal.
- Keep the animal as cool as possible during transport by adding ice packs to the cardboard box or cooler.

Do not place ice in the bags with the carcass.

- Clean personal protective equipment, knives, coolers and other contaminated items with hot, soapy water or an alcohol or bleach sanitizer. Wash contaminated clothing in a regular hot wash/dryer cycle.
- WASH hands with sanitizer.
- Contaminated surfaces can be cleaned with 1:10 bleach/water solution.

SKUNK SPECIMEN PREPARATION: To insure a valid test result, an appropriate specimen must be submitted. For skunks, only the head must be sent. Only persons with knowledge and adequate protective equipment to protect them from rabies virus exposure should do removal of heads. Specimens must be refrigerated immediately and held at 35-40F until shipped. **DO NOT FREEZE OR PLACE THE SPECIMEN IN A PRESERVATIVE SUCH AS FORMALIN.**

SHIPMENT:

- Skunk samples for surveillance are not time critical and can be refrigerated, held over the weekend or for a couple days to be batched with other samples. Specimens should be sent within 2-3 days of collection. Skunks involved in human exposures require immediate submission and CDPHE must be notified immediately including after-hours.
- Specimens should be double-bagged in plastic and sealed in an inner waterproof container with cold packs (not dry or wet ice) to insure no leakage during shipment.
- Use an outer shipping container or cardboard box. **It is the responsibility of the submitting agency to insure no leakage occurs during shipment as this causes great concern for parties handling the package and may result in the loss of delivery service.**
- A Rabies Diagnostic Laboratory form must accompany each specimen. Multiple specimens in the same shipment each need a separate form and must be clearly identified.
- The package should be labeled as a “biological specimen.”
- Ship specimens overnight by FedEx or use the department’s courier Kangaroo express. Shipping address: Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Lab, 8100 Lowry Blvd, Denver, CO 80230

CDPHE should be advised of all incoming specimens by faxing a copy of each Rabies Diagnostic Laboratory form to Janell Kenfield at 303-782-0338 (fax).

TEST RESULTS AND CONSULTATION: Positive rabies tests are telephoned to CDPHE and the submitting agency immediately. Negative results are reported by mail. Submitting agencies can view results in the zoonotic database or by calling the CDPHE laboratory for results during regular business hours at (303) 692-3485.

For consultation on rabies exposure, testing, bite follow-up and reporting, and rabies pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis contact the Disease Control and Environmental Epidemiology Division at (303) 692-2700 during business hours or (303) 370-9395 for after-hours, weekend and holiday emergencies.