

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 Project 2008 Guidelines for the handling and submission of skunks

BACKGROUND: Skunk rabies may 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. In an effort to identify rabies activity, CDPHE is conducting a rabies surveillance project for skunks showing abnormal behavioral signs of rabies or found dead on roadsides to determine the distribution of skunk rabies in eastern Colorado. Laboratory-based rabies surveillance is essential for developing rabies prevention recommendations and control measures.

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 CRITERIA:

- Dead < 48 hours
- No maggots; if maggots are present do not collect the specimen.
- Head and skull are intact
- Strange behavior; out during daytime, animal exposure, aggressive
- Roadkill
- **Do not submit normal behaving skunks; i.e. late night trash scavengers**

SKUNK SPECIMEN PREPARATION: To insure a valid test an appropriate specimen must be submitted. For skunks, only the head must be sent. Persons with knowledge and adequate protective equipment to protect them from rabies virus exposure should only 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:

- As this is a surveillance project and samples are not time critical, specimens 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.
- 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.**
- An appropriate laboratory requisition form for CDPHE or Colorado State University 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.”
- For specimens going to Colorado State Veterinary Diagnostic Lab ship specimens by FedEx. Shipping address: 300 West Drake Road in Fort Collins, CO 80526. Call 1-800-GOFEDEX for pick-up and overnight delivery. If you do not have a shipping label, inform the FedEx courier at time of call and he will provide one for you. Call the CSU laboratory or Janell Bezdek for the account number to use on FedEx shipping label and check bill the recipient.
- For specimens going to CDPHE use the state lab courier Kangaroo Express or overnight delivery service to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Lab Services Division, 8100 Lowry Blvd in Denver, CO 80230.

Please advise CDPHE of all incoming specimens by faxing a copy of each Rabies Diagnostic Laboratory form to Janell Bezdek at 303-782-0338.

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 CDPHE for results during regular business hours at (303) 692-3485 or the CSU Diagnostic Lab at (970) 491-1281.

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-hour, weekend and holiday emergencies.