



To all veterinary office managers and staff,

San Mateo County Health periodically receives reports of dog or cat bites and inquiries regarding the need to test the euthanized animal for rabies. This letter is intended to provide you with guidance and references the relevant laws and regulations.

As you know, all 58 counties in California are endemic for rabies. California State law requires that any dead animal (excluding rodents and lagomorphs) that is capable of transmitting rabies, and has bitten in the last 10 days, be tested for rabies.

The submitting veterinarian is responsible for decapitating and transporting the head for testing to the San Mateo County Public Health Laboratory located at 225 37th Avenue, Room 104, San Mateo, CA 94403. A copy of a completed [bite report](http://www.smchealth.org/rabies) must be submitted with the head. The bite report is available online at: www.smchealth.org/rabies. Please note that the **San Mateo County Public Health Laboratory and Peninsula Humane Society do not offer decapitation or transportation services.**

If a resident contact, you for a sick or injured wild animal please have them contact the Peninsula Humane Society at 650-340-7022.

The San Mateo County Public Health Laboratory is open Monday – Friday, 8 am – 5 pm.

**SAN MATEO COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORY
ANIMAL BRAINS/BAT STORAGE AND TRANSPORTATION GUIDELINES**

NOTE: Avoid damage to the brain (e.g., traumatizing procedures such as crushing the skull)

1. Use chloroform, flea spray, or 70% alcohol to kill any fleas that may be present.
2. Decapitate the head from the body ensuring the area that needs to be cut is flat. **Only submit the head.** For bats, please submit the whole body. **NOTES:** (1) *DO NOT formalin fix brain tissue.* (2) *If submitting tissue, full cross sections of the brain stem and the cerebellum is desired, it is optional to submit the hippocampus.*
3. Allow excess blood to drain before placing the head in a biohazard bag and/or shipping container.
4. It is ideal to drop off the specimen at the Public Health Laboratory; however, if you





need to ship the animal head or brain, please refer to the hyperlink for packaging and shipping according to Infectious Substance UN 3373, Category B Instructions. www.un3373.com/category-biological-substances/category-b.

5. Keep the head refrigerated until it is delivered to the Public Health Laboratory. For optimal testing results, please submit the head ASAP. **DO NOT FREEZE IT.**
6. If the head needs to be returned after testing, please indicate it on the submission form. In addition, please notify the Public Health Laboratory staff either in person when you drop off the specimen or via phone at 650-573-2500 if the specimen is being delivered to the laboratory by another staff member on your behalf.

The Public Health Laboratory cannot determine whether a decomposed sample will be rejected until necropsy is performed. If the brain is not severely decomposed, the Public Health Laboratory will perform testing. If the sample is severely decomposed, testing may not be able to be performed, or may be resulted as “unsatisfactory”.

Please note that paragraph 4 “Laboratory Examination of Rabid Animals, Clinically Suspected Rabid Animals or Biting Animals Which Die or Have Been Killed” at the bottom of page 6 of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) “Laws and Regulations Relating to RABIES: Excerpts from the California Health and Safety Code and the California Code of Regulations” which is enclosed for your review, reads as follows:

“If any rabid animal, clinically suspected rabid animal or biting animal dies or has been killed, adequate specimens shall be obtained and examined in a public health laboratory approved by the department. No person shall destroy or allow to be destroyed the brain of an animal of a species subject to rabies that has bitten or otherwise exposed a person before the destruction of such brain has been authorized by the local health department; provided, however, that the provisions of this paragraph (4) shall not apply to rodents (members of the order Rodentia) and rabbits or hares (members of the order Lagomorpha).”

- Please remember to complete a [bite report](#) for ALL animal bites and fax it to the Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA at 650-685-0102 or email it to dispatch@phs-sPCA.org. If you are transporting an animal head to the Public Health Laboratory for testing, please bring a copy of the completed bite report with you. A bite report template can be found at: www.smchealth.org/rabies.



SAN MATEO COUNTY HEALTH
**PUBLIC HEALTH,
POLICY & PLANNING**

- Prior to euthanizing a pet, the pet owner should be asked if the animal is under quarantine due to a bite. If that pet is under quarantine due to a bite, the head should be submitted for rabies testing, regardless of the reason for euthanasia.

As a reminder – Adverse vaccine and drug reporting:

Adverse events associated with drugs (medicines, compounded formulations), supplements, and devices should be reported to the FDA. Adverse events associated with vaccines should be reported to the USDA. Adverse events associated with pesticides (flea and tick products) should be reported to the EPA. For detailed information regarding adverse events reporting, go to:

FDA: [How to Report Animal Drug and Device Side Effects and Product Problems | FDA](#)

USDA: [USDA APHIS | Adverse Event Reporting](#). Note that manufacturers are to be contacted directly.

EPA: [Where to Start with Pesticide Incidents \(orst.edu\)](#)

If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Lori Morton-Feazell, Animal Control Licensing Program Manager, at 650-573-3726.

Thank you for helping us to protect the health and safety of our community!

Enclosures:

- Quarantine Algorithm for Biting Domestic Animals
- Laws and Regulations Relating to RABIES: Excerpts from the California Health and Safety Code and the California Code of Regulations
- <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/CARabiesLawsandRegulations.pdf>