



Bureau of Public Health Laboratories (BPHL)
Jacksonville - Miami - Pensacola - Tampa

Rabies Testing

Human rabies is a rare but fatal disease caused by exposure to an infected wild or domestic animal. Since canine rabies vaccination programs were implemented in the early 1950s, the number of rabies cases in domestic animals has declined significantly. However, as rabies infections in dogs declined, the number of cases in wild animals increased. In Florida, rabies is now found predominately in bats and raccoons. If an individual is exposed to a rabid animal, treatment can prevent the progression to disease. Rabies prophylactic treatment is costly and must be administered soon after exposure to be effective. The Florida Department of Health Bureau of Public Health Laboratories (BPHL), which is the sole provider of rabies testing in Florida, performs rabies testing on animals suspected of carrying the disease. Laboratory results are used by health care providers to determine whether or not treatment is needed.

Highlights/specialties

- Rabies testing is available 7 days per week for high risk exposures.
- State labs perform the CDC standard rabies protocol on approximately 3,000 samples per year.
- All positive results are reported immediately to the local county health department and the Bureau of Epidemiology.
- Between 1989 and 2009 over 3,500 animals have tested positive for rabies in Florida.
- Most rabies positive results in Florida are found in raccoons, foxes, bats, otters, bobcats, skunks and domestic cats.
- Labs provide consultative services to county health departments and environmental health personnel to assist in determining when testing is needed.
- Perform monoclonal antibody testing on rabies positive terrestrial animals to identify rabies variants in the state of Florida.
- Perform speciation of bats submitted for rabies testing to track which species are the primary reservoir for rabies in Florida.



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