

**New Jersey Department of Agriculture
Animal Health Diagnostic Laboratory
User Policies**

Necropsy Diagnostic Services

A necropsy is the examination of an animal body after death. Each animal necropsy is unique. Please call the laboratory to determine which necropsy service offering best suits your situation, if not sure. The animal body should be refrigerated ASAP if a necropsy is not possible. Freezing an animal body is not recommended and should be a last resort. A freeze/thaw will damage tissue due to ice crystals and make observations very difficult if not impossible. However, some tests for infectious diseases (viral, bacterial) and some toxicology analyses can be conducted on frozen samples.

Standard necropsy: The purpose of standard necropsy diagnostic service is to determine the cause of death, or extent of disease involving a process of dissection of the animal body, gross and/or microscopic evaluation of the organs and interpretation and documentation of the observed findings. Standard necropsy procedure does not preserve an animal's body intact. Animal remains after necropsy are not suitable for viewing. However, a standard necropsy is a near complete examination and provides better opportunity to determine cause of death or extent of disease.

Cosmetic necropsy: A limited necropsy diagnostic procedure is designed to determine the cause of death with minimal invasiveness, restricting dissections and incisions so that the animal body retains a presentable condition for viewing. An incision is made just enough to adequately evaluate the internal organs and obtain whatever samples are necessary if possible. The incision is then sutured so that minimal disturbance is evident. This type of necropsy is not amenable to near complete examination and may severely restrict opportunities to determine cause of death or extent of disease. Cosmetic necropsy is not recommended when near complete examination of body is necessary to have a better opportunity to determine the cause of death or extent of disease. A cosmetic necropsy is performed at the discretion of the laboratory to ensure that communicable diseases are diagnosed and public health is not compromised.

Forensic/legal necropsy: This type of necropsy is reserved for investigation of animal-related crimes or other situations that have legal implications and goes beyond standard necropsy in its objectives and relevance. A forensic/legal necropsy, in addition to determining cause of death, attempts to establish the manner of death (non-accidental, accidental, natural or undetermined), any contributory causes and the possible the time of death. Animal remains after a necropsy are not suitable for viewing.

Insurance necropsy: This is a standard necropsy that always involves photographic documentation in consultation with an insurance policy.

Policies on Necropsy and Other Laboratory Services

1. Standard necropsy service is offered on most animal species except non-human primates.
2. Cosmetic necropsy service is reserved for small companion animals that weigh less than 100 lbs.(45.5 kg). Arrangements for a cosmetic necropsy must be made by contacting the laboratory for approval prior to submission of the animal. Cosmetic necropsy service is provided at the discretion of the laboratory dependent on the nature of the case.

3. Forensic/legal/insurance necropsy service is offered on most animal species except non-human primates. It is the responsibility of the submitting party to contact the laboratory regarding cases involving insurance, forensic, or potential legal aspects to ensure full documentation. Additional charges to the cost of the necropsy may incur anytime during the investigation if it becomes a legal/forensic/insurance case.
4. A general specimen submission form must accompany the carcass and/or specimens. A neurologic form must be submitted for neurologic cases in addition to general submission form. USDA approved forms must be submitted for Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) and Brucellosis testing. The form/s may be submitted in advance of carcass/specimen submission. The form must be completely filled. The laboratory will not proceed with a necropsy or testing if a submission form is not received or completely filled.
5. Animal owners are highly encouraged to submit carcasses and specimens through licensed private veterinary practitioners. Regulatory tests (e.g. Equine Infectious Anemia) requiring sample collection and submission by an accredited veterinarian will not be tested if collected and submitted by the animal owner. Interpretation or utilization of laboratory results in the context of animal or herd health to provide services like treatment to cure diseases, vaccinations to prevent diseases, issuance of health certificates and the like are within the practice of veterinary medicine and therefore done by licensed veterinarians as provided in the Veterinary Practice Act. The laboratory cannot advise owners on services that are within the practice of veterinary medicine. When carcasses and specimens are submitted by licensed veterinarians, all case correspondence including reporting is done through the submitting veterinarian.

Handling of Animal Remains/Specimens

According to CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/basics/zoonotic-diseases.html>), zoonotic diseases are very common, both in the United States and around the world. Scientists estimate that more than 6 out of every 10 known infectious diseases in people are spread from animals, and 3 out of every 4 new or emerging infectious diseases in people are spread from animals. Every year, tens of thousands of Americans will get sick from harmful germs spread between animals and people. It is out of the scope of the necropsy procedure to test carcasses for hundreds of infectious agents that could be transmitted from animals to humans.

AHDL's longstanding practice prohibits, the release of any animal remains directly to owners, veterinarians or submitters, regardless of the type of necropsy service provided by the laboratory. The reasons for this policy includes mitigating the risk of disease transmission from animal carcass remains and tissues to either the owner or the owners' other animals or the general population. As such, upon submission, animal remains and specimens become the property of AHDL.

Routine laboratory disposal of animal remains is not included in the quoted fee of necropsy services. There is a separate fee for disposal based on the weight of the animal. Please refer to fee schedule for disposal fee. The only exception to the disposal fee is poultry avian necropsy as disposal is included in the test fee. The AHDL does not provide cremation or burial services, but may release animal remains to a licensed pet memorial funeral service (crematorium). The animal owner or the animal owner's private veterinarian make the financial arrangements with the private pet memorial service; provide the name of the company and the laboratory will arrange the date of release and pick-up directly with the company. If specific instructions for disposal of animal remains are not provided at the time of submission, the animal remains will be disposed of 30 days after submission at the discretion of the laboratory.

Animals confirmed to be infected with Rabies virus, Eastern Equine Encephalitis virus, West Nile virus or other zoonotic diseases will have remains disposed of as regulated medical waste. This is a necessary decontamination procedure for these types of cases and cannot be released to a private pet memorial funeral service.

Billing Policies

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture is permitted by law to charge those fees for animal disease diagnostic and testing services which are necessary for the Department to recover the costs incurred for materials, equipment, test kits, reagents, and some associated personnel expenses for these testing services. Statements are mailed at the beginning of each month for the previous month's services. Payment is due from first time clients prior to service. Our payment policy is net 30 days. 1.5% service charge per month may apply after 30 days of invoice date (18% per annum). The NJDA reserves the right to take the appropriate legal action to collect any fees not paid within 90 days. The client is responsible for all collection costs, including but not limited to attorney's fees and court costs. Laboratory results may not be released for delinquent accounts. Only cash, checks or money orders are accepted at this time. Checks should be made payable to: NJDA-Animal Health Diagnostic Laboratory.

Animal Submission Acknowledgement

The submitter must fill out the animal submission acknowledgement form and agree with the content at the time of necropsy submission.