
Necropsy Submission Guidelines and Shipping

Intact Carcass Submissions

The biggest handicap ViTALS has to overcome is postmortem autolysis (natural degradation of tissue after death). It is extremely important that the animal be necropsied as soon as possible after death. Postmortem autolysis and putrefaction lessen the chance of establishing a diagnosis with each passing hour.

Small intact carcasses should be chilled to refrigeration temperatures as quickly as possible. Avoid freezing carcasses unless long delays are anticipated. Freezing can cause issues with tissues used for histopathology and make some pathogen isolation impossible; a field necropsy is recommended for these situations. Please contact the necropsy laboratory if you have additional questions. **See page 3 for shipping intact carcasses.**

ViTALS does not accept wildlife from private citizens for necropsy. Contact the Virginia Department of Agriculture for these submissions.

Veterinarian- All necropsy submissions must be authorized/submitted through a veterinarian, unless the owner lives within a 35-mile radius of the VMCVM. Typically, this could be the patient's routine veterinarian.

Submission Form- Use the Necropsy Submission Form located on the ViTALS website.

History- Complete and comprehensive histories are extremely important to the diagnostic process. Be sure to indicate all treatments and vaccinations (including rabies). List impression or suspected causes of death. *Indicate on the form if this is for an insurance or legal case.*

Disposal of Remains- Indicate on the necropsy submission form the appropriate action for disposal of the animal's remains. Options include:

1. Internal Disposal (mass cremation with no ashes returned) or
2. Private Cremation (additional fees apply & must be paid before services are rendered).
 - a. Private cremation services for necropsy cases are offered at an additional cost to the owner.
 - b. Cremains are returned to the owners by the crematorium through UPS with tracking.
 - c. Cremation is **not** offered as an a la carte service independent of necropsy. Please contact a crematorium directly for cremation only services.

Note: Necropsied remains **will not** be given/mailed back to the owners or clinicians for home disposal/burial.

Carcasses can be submitted/dropped off to:

- ViTALS Necropsy Department at the VMCVM Veterinary Teaching Hospital

Normal Business Hours

Monday through Friday
8:00 A.M. until 5:00 P.M.
Contact the necropsy department at 540-231-4619 to coordinate the drop-off.

After-hours/Holiday/Main Campus Closures

Submissions are accommodated by on-call veterinary students and pathologists.

Call 540-231-9032 to initiate the necropsy on-call process.

- **Check-in at the VMCVM small animal front desk and pre-payments are required before necropsy can be performed.**

Field Necropsy Submissions

When it is not practical to deliver the entire carcass to the ViTALS Necropsy Service, samples may be collected and submitted from a field post-mortem examination. Field necropsy submissions are charged according to the histology fee structure, refer to ViTALS Testing & Fees for charges.

- Fill out the **histology submission form**. (Form is located on the website under submission forms)
- Formalin-fixed tissue samples for histological examination should follow histopathology submission procedures. Typically, we recommend submitting a “Starburst” candy-sized (1 cm x 1 cm x ¼ cm) representative section of various organs from each of the major organ systems and sections of any gross lesions identified at field necropsy. Lesions should be collected in separate containers and labeled with the site. All other routine sections may be co-mingled in a single jar. (Note: A 1:10 ratio of tissue to formalin is recommended for best fixation practices).
- **Leaking sample prevention:** Use only leakproof rigid containers with a tight sealing lid for shipping formalin fixed tissues. Leaking samples may be assessed a hazardous sample handling fee by ViTALS or cause shipping delays/loss of package via shipping company.

Avoid using household food containers, glass containers, whirl packs, zip top bags, etc.

- Swabs/Cultures/Blood/Urine/Feces/Tissue Samples collected for microbiology or other clinical services should follow those service’s sample requirements and submission procedures. Additional fees apply. This information can be found on the ViTALS Tests & Fees document linked on our home page.
- Photographs or digital images of carcasses and lesions are welcome and encouraged; please include with the submission form(s) or call ViTALS, if submitting separately.
- Provide a detailed history and any gross findings or abnormalities noted during the field necropsy.
- Even if at the time of the field necropsy a toxicological investigation is not suspected, it is good practice to collect fresh tissue samples from, at least, the liver and kidney. Freeze and retain them **at your** clinic/practice/institution. ViTALS **does not** offer toxicology testing but we can help you find an appropriate referral laboratory, if desired.

If you have additional questions, please contact our histology department at 540-231-5276.

Recommended Shipping Instructions

Federal regulations pertaining to shipping of biological samples change on a regular basis. The following guidelines will assist you in meeting the requirements and we will update this information as changes to the regulations occur. The submitter is responsible for compliance with the shipping regulations.

Ship intact carcasses to:

ViTALS/ Lab Central
Necropsy Department
245 Duck Pond Drive
Blacksburg, VA 24061

Ship field necropsy &/or other lab samples to:

ViTALS/ Lab Central
245 Duck Pond Drive
Blacksburg, VA 24061

- **Overnight shipping is required, preferably by FedEx or UPS ONLY.** Do not ship samples to arrive on Saturday or Sunday, as the laboratory is closed. Contact ViTALS concerning holiday shipping/receiving schedules. Pre-paid, flat-rate FEDEX mailer labels are **NOT available** for necropsy shipping. US Postal Service is not recommended due to delivery delays caused by main campus routing of USPS mail. Contact ViTALS for more information.
- Courier Services are available to the New River Valley area veterinary clinics for small carcass necropsies. Contact VITALS to see if you qualify!

Necropsy Submissions- small, intact carcasses only:

- Chill carcass to refrigeration temperatures prior to packaging. Avoid freezing temperatures, if possible.
 - The carcass should be wrapped within three plastic bags:
 1. Inner plastic bag- should be leak proof (i.e. large zipper lock bag) and sealed with plastic packing tape or zip tie.
 2. Middle plastic bag- the bagged carcass should be placed within a second leak proof plastic bag. Add absorbent material (e.g. disposable diapers) and freezer packs to this bag. Avoid using ice cubes which increases the likelihood of the package leaking. Securely tape or zip tie this bag closed.
 3. Outermost bag- place the above in a third plastic bag and securely tape or zip tie this bag closed.
- ***PLEASE NOTE: Packages that are identified to be leaking by the shipping carrier can be confiscated and destroyed, and the sender may be fined.*****
- Include relevant paperwork (i.e. submission form). Enclose paperwork within a separate, sealed plastic bag.
 - **IMPORTANT:** Place all of the above in a crush-proof shipping cooler or sturdy carton.
 - Label outside package with UN3373 label, Biological Substance Category B (see page 4). This label should be taped onto the outside of the package.
 - If you need to define contents, list as 'Animal Diagnostic Specimens' to comply with above category. **Avoid describing the contents as 'dead animal' or 'carcass'. The shipper will not accept the package if you describe it as such.**

VIRGINIA TECH
ANIMAL LABORATORY SERVICES



245 Duck Pond Drive
Blacksburg, VA 24061
540-231-4320
540-231-2657 fax
email: vitalslcr@vt.edu
<https://vitals.vetmed.vt.edu/>

Ship via UPS or FEDEX using overnight shipping. DO NOT SHIP REMAINS ON FRIDAY or SATURDAY. Staff are not available to receive packages on SATURDAY or SUNDAY. Call the necropsy laboratory during holidays for any additional shipping instructions or cautions.

Note: It is strictly prohibited to ship live or sick animals via commercial couriers or the US postal service.

