
Necropsy Submission Guidelines

In addition to general submission guidelines, these should also be taken into consideration:

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, after death, as possible. Postmortem autolysis and putrefaction lessen the chance of establishing a diagnosis with each passing hour.

Small 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 makes some pathogen isolation impossible; a field necropsy is recommended for these situations. Please contact the necropsy laboratory if you have additional questions.

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

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

History- Complete & comprehensive histories are extremely important to the diagnostic process. Be sure to indicate all treatments and vaccinations, including rabies. List impressions or suspected causes of the death.

Disposal of Remains- Indicate on the necropsy submission form the appropriate action for disposal of the animal's remains. Note: Necropsied remains may not be mailed back to owners or clinicians for home disposal/burial. Private cremation services for necropsy cases is offered at additional cost to the owner. Remains are returned to owners by the crematorium through the mail. Cremation is NOT offered as an ala carte service independent of necropsy, please contact a crematorium directly for cremation only services.

Carcasses can be submitted to ViTALS Necropsy department at the VMCVM Veterinary Teaching hospital, Monday through Friday 8:00am until 5:00pm. Contact the necropsy department at 540.231.4619 to coordinate the drop-off. After-hours submissions are accommodated by on-call veterinary students and pathologists. If after-hours, call 540.231.9032 to initiate the necropsy on-call process.

Check-in at the VMCVM small animal front desk and pre-payment 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 charge according to the histology fee structure, refer to ViTALS Testing & Fees for charges.

- Fill out the histology submission form.
- Formalin-fixed tissue samples for histological examination should follow histopathology submission procedures. Typically, we recommend submitting a “Starburst” candy-sized 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)
- Swabs/Culturettes/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.
- 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.