Animal & Plant Health Agency

APHA SCIENTIFIC

Rabies serology test for pet travel schemes FAQ

December 2018

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Is APHA an EU Approved Laboratory for rabies serology?

Yes APHA is an EU approved laboratory – see https://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/pet-movement/approved-labs_en.

Is APHA an OIE Reference Laboratory for Rabies?

Yes, APHA is an OIE Reference Laboratory for Rabies and is authorised to test all sera for the Australian Pet Travel Scheme.

Will APHA remain an EU approved laboratory when the UK leaves the EU?

Yes. Approval is retained by successfully completing an annual inter-laboratory aptitude test organised by the EU Reference Laboratory (EURL) for Rabies Serology, ANSES, France.

The process for retaining approval applies to all laboratories in both EU and non-EU countries and will not change when the UK leaves the EU, even in the event of a no deal exit (https://ec.europa.eu/food/animals/pet-movement/approved-labs_en).

The inter-laboratory aptitude panels are dispatched every April and laboratories receive the results in October. APHA passed the 2018 exercise which allows us to retain approval until October 2019. The EURL has confirmed that we will receive the 2019 panel and there is no reason to believe that our approval will not be maintained in subsequent years. In addition to approval by the EU, the APHA serology laboratory is accredited to the highest quality standard (ISO17025) and successfully participates in additional rabies serology proficiency schemes in the UK and USA.

How do I find out what the requirements are for travelling to the EU after the UK leaves the EU?

The government has provided advice regarding travelling to the EU. Please see the following document for further information:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/taking-your-pet-abroad-if-theres-no-brexit-deal

Which test format should I choose?

APHA offers the FAVN in two test formats, a reduced and an extended dilution format. Results from both tests are expressed in IU/ml and are suitable for pet travel schemes, including the EU and Australian pet travel schemes. The reduced dilution format (TC0712) is cheaper with a faster turnaround time and so should be the preferred choice. The extended format is available only if veterinarians require an end point titre for high titre samples, however, this is considered in excess of pet travel schemes.

What is FAVN and is it different to the RNATT?

The Fluorescent Antibody Virus Neutralisation (FAVN) test is a live virus test which determines whether the animal has adequate levels of rabies antibodies following vaccination. An antibody level ≥0.5IU/ml is deemed adequate to protect against rabies. The FAVN is an approved RNATT (Rabies Neutralising Antibody Titre Test) for monitoring the effectiveness of vaccines for the purposes of commercial and non-commercial pet travel.

Is the FAVN test the same as the OIE-FAVN?

Yes. The test is performed following the FAVN procedure in the OIE manual.

How much does the rabies serology cost?

APHA test prices can be found here.

Sample submission:

How long after my pet has been vaccinated can I have a sample taken?

For the EU pet travel scheme, if serological testing is required, a blood sample must be taken at least 30 days post vaccination and be successfully tested for the presence of rabies neutralising antibodies (0.5 IU/ml or above). We strongly recommend confirming with the relevant animal health authority before arranging vaccination and blood testing as

regulations for entry into each country vary. Please be aware that antibody titres can wane rapidly, particularly after a single primary dose in a little as 5-8 weeks. A private veterinarian may decide to administer a booster vaccination in certain circumstances if there has been a delay between vaccination and sampling to increase the probability of obtaining a titre above 0.5IU/ml.

How much serum should I send?

We recommend a minimum of 1 ml of serum per submission.

How long can my pets sample be stored before I send it?

Sending a sample promptly after collection is recommended. If the serum requires storage we recommend storing for no longer than 2 weeks in a refrigerator. For longer storage, serum can be frozen at -20ºC.

Can I send a photocopy of the pet submission form with the serum sample?

No - The original certificate with the vet's signature must be sent. A veterinary surgeon must collect the sample and sign the form with ink to confirm that all details are correct.

How do I send my sample to APHA?

- Each serum sample should be sent with a completed submission form (one per sample) http://apha.defra.gov.uk/documents/surveillance/forms/form-vlarab1.pdf
- A minimum of 1ml serum (preferable) or 2ml clotted blood should be sent in a plain tube, marked with the owner's name, animal's name and microchip number.
- Each serum sample should be sent in an insulated leak-proof container (IATA packing instructions 650)
- Label the packaging with the following:
    - Canine/feline serum samples – no commercial value
    - Category 3 Veterinary diagnostic specimens – not restricted

Additional requirements for samples submitted from non-EU countries:

- Submissions must be accompanied by an import licence (Appendix 1 of submission form) and labelled as follows:
    - Canine/feline serum samples – no commercial value
    - Category 3 Veterinary diagnostic specimens – not restricted
    - Packaged according with IATA Packing Instructions 650

        - Import licence ITIMP17.008
        - Your country of origin
- Indicate maximum value of the goods of $1. Failure to do so may result in additional importation charges. APHA will not accept any additional charges, these must be paid for by the customer.
- A cover letter on headed note paper must also be enclosed, signed by the submitting veterinary surgeon describing the contents of the package (i.e. the number of serum samples submitted per species). The letter must also enclose a freedom from Disease Declaration' stating the following:
    i. The serum is not derived from an animal known or suspected to be infected with a pathogen which causes a notifiable disease to which the animal from which the serum is derived is susceptible according to European Regulations* or the Animal Health Regulations of the exporting country; and
    ii. That the serum does not originate from an animal in a premise or region or zone of a country that is subject to official restrictions due to a notifiable disease to which the animals are susceptible according to European or other National Animal Health Regulations.
    *Council Directive 81/894/EEC of 21 December 1982 (as amended) on the notification of animal diseases within the Community

- Send your completed submission form and sample to:

  Rabies Serology / Sample Reception
  Animal and Plant Health Agency
  Woodham Lane,
  New Haw, Addlestone,
  Surrey, KT15 3NB
  United Kingdom

Results:

How long will it be before I receive my results?

FAVN test results are normally available within 1-2 weeks from the date the sample is received. However depending on the number of samples received this can vary. We are anticipating an increase in the number of samples received and have increased our test capacity to respond to this demand. Our maximum turnaround time is currently 14 working days. This allows for treatment and repeat testing of any haemolysed sera that fail to provide a result on first testing. Customers will not be charged for such repeat tests as this is part of our high quality service.

What does my result mean?

A result of 0.5IU/ml or higher is considered an acceptable level of rabies virus neutralising antibodies for the purposes of pet travel. A result <0.5IU/ml is considered inadequate and booster vaccination will be required.

Why is my result reported as >= XX IU/ml?

Depending on the level of rabies-specific antibodies in the sample, the result will either be reported as a specific titre (XX IU/ml) or reported as >= XX IU/ml.

Samples reported as >= XX IU/ml have a higher titre than the end point titre of the test. A result reported as >= XX IU/ml is acceptable for pet travel schemes.

Why has my pet's sample failed the FAVN test despite it being vaccinated?

For the EU pet travel scheme, if serological testing is required, a blood sample must be taken at least 30 days post vaccination and be successfully tested for the presence of rabies neutralising antibodies (0.5 IU/ml or above). Neutralising antibody levels wane rapidly after primary vaccination, in some cases to below the 0.5 IU/ml cut-off in as little as 5-8 weeks. However, levels can be maintained above 0.5 IU/ml in animals that have received booster vaccinations. A recommendation from a private veterinary surgeon for a booster vaccination prior to any blood sampling must therefore take into consideration the vaccination history, sampling interval and health status of the pet.

On rare occasions, some pets fail to reach the 0.5IU/ml cut-off despite a booster vaccination. In such cases, private veterinary surgeons may recommend that a different vaccine make is used for the booster vaccination to improve the probability of a successful test result.

How do I find out more information?

For advice on pet travel scheme requirements please contact the APHA PETS helpline or the importing country's authority.

Email: pettravel@apha.gov.uk
Tel: +44 (0)370 241 1710

For test related queries please contact our Laboratory Services Team

Email: lab.services@apha.gov.uk
Tel: +44 (0)208 415 2280

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/publications

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

lab.services@apha.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/apha

The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) is an executive agency of the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, and also works on behalf of the Scottish Government and Welsh Government.