Rabies serology test for pet travel schemes

FAQ

December 2018

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Which Laboratories in the UK are EU Approved for rabies serology?

There are currently two EU approved laboratories in the UK that can offer rabies antibody titration tests for the EU Pet Travel Scheme – see


Will the UK labs retain EU approval 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. The two UK Rabies Serology Labs passed the 2018 exercise which grants approval until October 2019. The EURL has confirmed that they will receive the 2019 panel and subject to successful outcomes for the aptitude tests, approval will be maintained in subsequent years.

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?

The reduced dilution Fluorescent Antibody Virus Neutralisation test (FAVN or RNATT) offered by both of the EU approved laboratories in the UK are suitable for pet import schemes including the EU and Australian pet travel schemes. Results are expressed in
IU/ml and a value equal to or greater than 0.5 IU/ml is considered successful. An extended format is available at both laboratories on request should veterinarians require an end point titre for high titre samples, however, though this is not required for pet travel schemes.

What is FAVN and is it different to the RNATT?

The Fluorescent Antibody Virus Neutralisation (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. The 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.

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?

Please see the respective websites of the approved rabies serology laboratories for pricing information and test turnaround times.

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 may vary for different pet travel schemes.

Please be aware that neutralising antibody titres can wane rapidly after a single primary dose, in some cases in as little as 5-8 weeks. Antibody levels are usually maintained above the 0.5 IU/ml cut-off following booster vaccination. A veterinarian may decide to administer a booster vaccination in certain circumstances e.g. if there has been a delay between primary vaccination and sampling to increase the probability of obtaining a titre above 0.5IU/ml.
How much serum should I send?
Both labs recommend a minimum of 1 ml of serum (preferable) or 2 ml clotted blood 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 -20°C.

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 the Laboratory?
- Please see web sites of the respective labs for details and submission forms

Results:

How long will it be before I receive my results?
Please see web sites of the respective labs for details of turnaround times. Generally FAVN test results are normally available within 1-2 weeks from the date the sample is received.

What does my result mean?
A result of 0.5 IU/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

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