Frequently Asked Questions: Necropsy

What does the necropsy laboratory do?
The necropsy laboratory performs gross postmortem examinations (necropsies) on all types of animals—pets, farm animals, fish, birds, reptiles, amphibians, laboratory animals, and zoo animals—to determine the cause of illness and/or death. The staff also examines fresh and fixed tissue samples submitted by veterinarians who have performed necropsies at their local practices and forwarded samples to the laboratory for diagnostic evaluation. Selected tissues will be examined microscopically, while others may be submitted to other DCPAH labs for bacteriology, virology, toxicology, parasitology, nutritional, immunodiagnostic, and clinical pathology testing.

Does the necropsy service accept live animals?
The necropsy service accepts the following live animals during regular business hours: cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, poultry, laboratory animals, and fish. All animals are humanely euthanized prior to examination. If a necropsy is not performed, there is an additional charge for this service.

We do not accept live horses, bison, dogs, cats, mink, emus, or ferrets. These animals must be euthanized by a local veterinarian or brought to the MSU Veterinary Medical Center for euthanasia prior to delivery to DCPAH. Euthanasia of horses must be scheduled with the MSU Veterinary Medical Center prior to arrival on campus.

Live animals are not accepted afterhours.

How should animals be stored prior to necropsy?
Animal remains should be kept cool, but not frozen. Freezing creates artifacts which interfere with optimal gross and microscopic examination, and also causes considerable delays while the tissues are thawed. Refrigerate or store the animal on ice until it can be delivered to DCPAH. DCPAH provides large coolers to hold animals pending necropsy.

Does DCPAH accept animals for necropsy after-hours?
Afterhours, the laboratory accepts large animal submissions (equine or farm animals greater than 200 lbs) in cases of emergencies. Please contact the necropsy afterhours service at (517) 353-5275 for coordination. Necropsy personnel will meet the client at DCPAH, unload the animal, and place it in the cooler. There is an afterhours fee for this service in addition to any applicable necropsy and/or cremation fees.

Small or companion animals should be held until the following morning for drop off. If afterhours drop-off is required, clients may bring the animal to the MSU Veterinary Medical Center. The animal will be delivered to DCPAH for necropsy and/or cremation on the following business day.

How long do I have to wait for necropsy results?
Gross reports are issued by mail, fax, or Web within 48 hours of the necropsy. Final reports - which include histopathology and other ancillary laboratory results - are issued within 2 weeks (10 business days). Specialized testing - including toxicology, nutrition, certain microbiology, and outside referral tests - may take longer and will be reported in a separate addendum.
How are animals disposed of following necropsy?

The laboratory has a small crematorium which is used exclusively for private cremations. This allows the lab to offer private cremations for pets up to 200 lbs. In addition, the lab offers private memorial cremations for larger animals which can include the head, tail and hooves of the animal. Private cremation fees apply in addition to any other applicable fees.

Communal cremations are available at a significantly lower cost than a private cremation and are included with a necropsy. In cases where no necropsy is requested, the fee for the communal cremation is based on species. These can be done for animals of any size. Owners have the option to receive representative ashes at no additional cost.

Remains (individual or representative ashes) can be picked up at the laboratory or mailed to clients directly for an additional fee.

*Only animals less than 200 lbs may be released to a commercial pet cemetery. For safety reasons, animals will not be released to owners after they come to the lab.*

How do I contact the necropsy service?

During regular business hours, Monday through Friday 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., please call (517) 353-1683. From 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. on Saturdays, or for animal health emergencies outside of normal operating hours, please call (517) 353-5275 for an automated answering system.