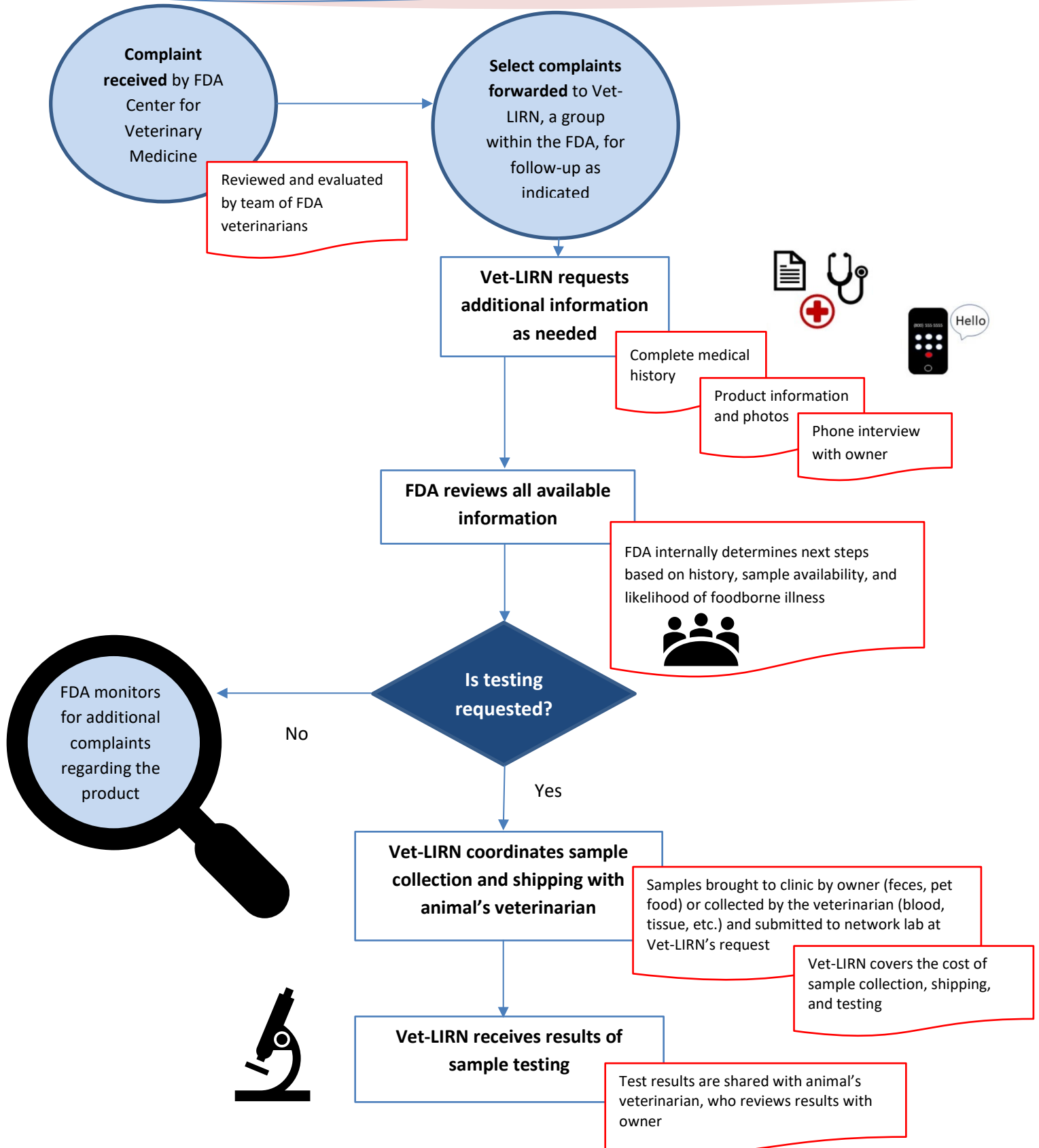


Vet-LIRN Consumer Complaint Follow-Up FAQs for Veterinarians

What happens during the Vet-LIRN consumer complaint process?



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Introduction

- 1. What is the Veterinary Laboratory Investigation and Response Network?**
 - The Veterinary Laboratory Investigation and Response Network (Vet-LIRN) is a program within the FDA Center for Veterinary Medicine (CVM). Vet-LIRN follows up on certain consumer complaints received by CVM that report illnesses in animals potentially caused by animal foods or drugs.
- 2. What is the goal of Vet-LIRN's consumer complaint follow-up?**
 - We try to figure out whether the product caused the animal's illness or death.
- 3. Is all the information in a consumer complaint kept confidential?**
 - No. This information is not shared unnecessarily but is generally not kept confidential to share with those assisting with our case (i.e., network laboratory personnel, veterinary staff assisting with sample shipping). Typically, only protected personal information (such as names and addresses) is withheld to prevent the complaint from being traced back to the person who submitted it.



Consumer Complaint Follow-up Procedures

- 1. What will Vet-LIRN do to follow up on a consumer complaint?**
 - In general, Vet-LIRN will collect additional background information from the animal owner and the animal's veterinarian, and in *some* cases may collect product samples or samples from the animal (such as feces) for testing.
- 2. What will Vet-LIRN ask of me as the animal's veterinarian during this process?**
 - Permission to contact the animal's owner: If you submitted the original consumer complaint, Vet-LIRN will request permission to contact the owner for additional follow-up, if needed.
 - Medical records: Vet-LIRN will ask you to provide the reported animal's complete medical history for our review. This complete history allows us to better understand the animal's health overall and any medical findings related to their reported illness. If the complaint was submitted by the animal owner, we will ask the owner to contact you directly to request the medical history.
 - Hold available product: Vet-LIRN may ask that you keep any remaining food product you have in your possession in case it is needed.
 - Product information: If you have a sample of the reported product, Vet-LIRN may request photos of the original product packaging including the product label (clearly stating the product name) and the product lot code and expiration date. The **lot code is a crucial piece of information** as described [here](#), and our follow-up is extremely limited when the lot code is unknown.

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- Clinical sample collection: In certain cases, we will request clinical samples for testing at one of our network laboratories.
 - Please note: The decision to test samples is based on multiple factors and is ultimately made by FDA; testing is *not* guaranteed.



Sample Testing

1. What types of testing might Vet-LIRN perform or request as part of their follow-up?

- Vet-LIRN may request testing of samples for harmful bacteria, toxic substances, or nutritional imbalances that could have led to the illness or death of the animal. This testing is performed at one of Vet-LIRN's network laboratories.
- Vet-LIRN may also request clinical testing be performed at your hospital, such as repeat bloodwork, urine testing, or necropsy in the case of an animal death.

2. What will Vet-LIRN ask of me, as the veterinarian, if testing is requested?

- Vet-LIRN will contact you to confirm your willingness to assist with the process. If samples will be provided by the owner (i.e., fecal testing or product testing), the owner will bring the samples to your hospital. For some sample types (blood, urine, etc.), we will request that the owner coordinate with you to collect these samples. Vet-LIRN will cover the cost for any fees related to collection of samples for our follow-up (e.g., examination fees, blood collection fees, etc.).
 - i. If we request testing from you, we will require an estimated cost *prior* to their completion to request internal approval for reimbursement.
- Upon confirmation of the testing plan, Vet-LIRN will, in most cases, send a sample shipping kit to your hospital, which will include detailed packaging instructions, laboratory submission forms, and the shipping materials necessary to ship the samples to the lab. We will provide tracking information for the shipping kit, so you know when to anticipate its arrival.
- After you receive the shipping kit, Vet-LIRN will request that you ship samples overnight. The sample should be shipped using a major commercial courier (Fedex/UPS). Vet-LIRN will reimburse your hospital for the costs associated with shipping the samples.

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3. If a necropsy is performed, can the owner request private cremation following the necropsy?

- Yes, depending on the laboratory. The owner will need to coordinate this service with the laboratory directly, and the cost of the cremation will *not* be covered by Vet-LIRN. Vet-LIRN will provide the owner with the information for the laboratory personnel to contact to arrange the cremation.

4. What can I do if Vet-LIRN does not request samples for testing and the owner wishes to pursue testing independently?

- In this circumstance, we recommend reaching out to a veterinary diagnostic laboratory of your choice to coordinate testing. Several veterinary diagnostic laboratories perform bacterial or toxicologic testing of animal foods. Please note: the owner is responsible for the cost of any testing.

Payment for Testing Costs

1. Who will pay for the cost of testing?

- Vet-LIRN will pay for any testing that **we specifically request**, as well as any costs for sample collection and shipment. Vet-LIRN will reimburse your hospital directly and is unable to provide any payment to an animal owner.
- Vet-LIRN will not cover the cost of any testing, treatment, or other veterinary services that we do not specifically request or that are completed prior to the complaint submission.

2. Who will pay for the cost of shipping the samples to the diagnostic laboratory?

- Your hospital will pay up-front for the cost of shipping the samples to the diagnostic laboratory; however, Vet-LIRN will reimburse the hospital. This allows the hospital to use their regular courier service (Fedex/UPS).

3. Do I need to provide any information for Vet-LIRN to reimburse for testing?

- Vet-LIRN will require a shipping receipt or invoice to provide the reimbursement for shipping. As previously stated, an estimate is also required *before* any other requested services are performed. Upon submission of all shipping and veterinary service receipts or invoices, Vet-LIRN will contact the hospital to provide reimbursement for all associated charges via credit card.

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Testing Results

- 1. Will samples be returned to either the veterinary hospital or to the owner when testing is complete?**
 - No. Once samples are submitted, they become the property of the FDA and will not be sent back to either the hospital or the owner. If possible, we encourage the retention of a small sample of any remaining product of concern in case there are any issues with sample shipping/testing.
- 2. Who will receive results of sample testing?**
 - Results will be shared with FDA and with you, the veterinarian. We ask that you review these results with the owner in case any additional treatment or testing is needed, since you have an established veterinarian-client-patient relationship. Vet-LIRN cannot provide an interpretation of test results or treatment recommendations.
- 3. What will FDA do with the results of sample testing?**
 - The FDA may conduct additional action, but this information will not be shared, as the FDA does not discuss internal deliberations, decisions, or regulatory action with the public.