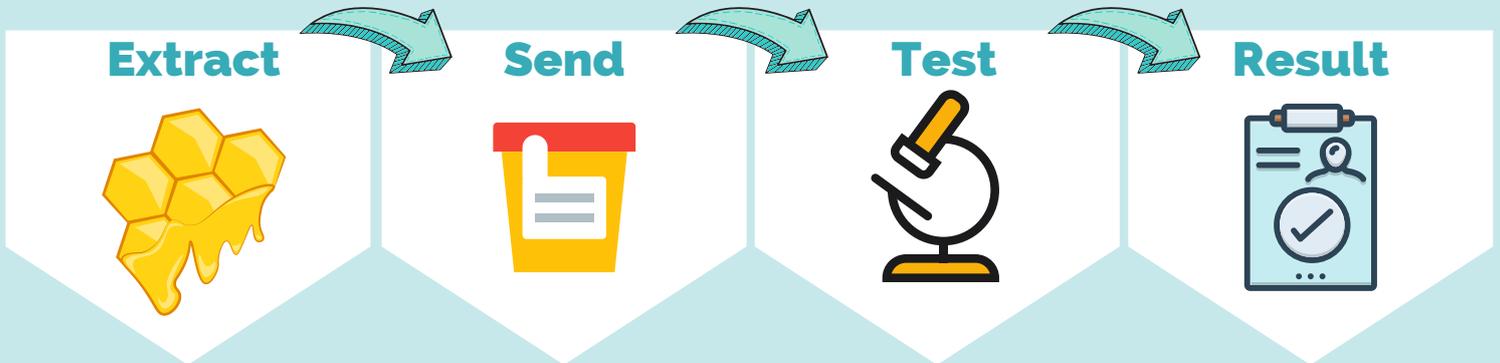


How to do an AFB Honey Test

by Colin Goodwin

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While honey testing is mandatory for commercial beekeepers, **I believe it is well worth doing for recreational beekeepers as well.** Several years ago we had a hive that just seemed to be performing worse and worse over a period of many months. It took a long time before I did a larval test for AFB, and discovered to my horror that the hive had AFB. So we had to immediately report the infection to the Apiary Officer, and then go through the process of containing and killing the bees, burning and burying frames, and irradiating the boxes. (The irradiation was reimbursed by the Vic Govt..) While the other hives in the apiary looked ok, we sent a honey sample off for AFB testing .. just in case. (Turned out that they were clear ... phew!)

In our BioSecurity Code, you can find the following:

Beekeepers with 50+ hives, must have honey tested annually for American foulbrood. American foulbrood (AFB) is the most widespread and significant bee disease in Australia. Early infections may be difficult to detect visually and laboratory evaluation of honey for AFB spores remains the most sensitive and accurate test for detection of the disease. The beekeeper is only required to have one test conducted on a pooled honey sample collected from at least 20% of their hives. More extensive testing, either through a laboratory or by using AFB test kits, is recommended to assist with AFB detection and control.

The lesson I learned is that AFB need **not** be a dramatic disease that kills your bees overnight .. rather it can be a slow insidious thing that turns a busy hive into a shadow of a hive. **Getting AFB in a hive is not a sign of bad beekeeping** .. your bees may find and rob diseased feral hives and bring the disease back. **However not detecting and dealing with AFB is bad beekeeping.**

So each year we take a sample of the honey we've taken from the hives in our apiary, and send it off for AFB testing.



How to do an AFB Honey Test.

The only lab that does AFB Honey Tests in Victoria is Gribbles Pathology
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You need to email Gribbles with your name, address, phone number and the number of kits required
Follow links in Newsletter

Gribbles will then send you kits, consisting of a specimen jar, plastic bag, return envelope, and a form to provide details of the specimen and details of how to pay by credit card

In a few weeks they will send you the results, which is not a simple yes/no to AFB, but rather an indication of the probability of having AFB spores in the sample

The recommendation is that you take a pooled sample from each apiary (mix up a little honey from all the hives in your apiary) and send that off.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?
\$46.50 per sample

If it's good news, then you can just file the result, and leave the bees alone over winter. If it's bad news, well then it's time to inspect all the hives and see which one's are infected, and deal with them. With a positive result comes a call from one of the Victorian Apiary Officers as they are informed of all positive test results. If you haven't heard from them in a couple of days from receiving a positive result you should call them. She/ he will guide you as to what to do next.

What about honey infected with AFB?

If you find that honey that you have collected for sale or gifting has AFB, it can still be used for your consumption. Of course it would be bad practice to sell it on as it may be accidentally exposed to bees, and certainly it must not be given to bees .. but you can safely cook or make drinks (e.g. mead) with it.

*This matter should, however, be discussed with your Apiary Officer.