

TECH NOTE

Animal Care

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

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Ensuring Adequate Veterinary Care: Roles and Responsibilities of Facility Owners and Attending Veterinarians

Under the Animal Welfare Act, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) requires that all persons who use animals in research or for exhibition, sell them at the wholesale level, or transport them in commerce provide these animals with adequate veterinary care and animal husbandry. Toward this end, APHIS requires the owner of each licensed and registered facility to establish a formal program of veterinary care. Facility owners must also employ an attending veterinarian to oversee the care afforded the animals.

Essential Components of a Veterinary Care Program

APHIS personnel assess each facility's veterinary care program to determine whether it contains the following elements:

- Appropriate facilities, personnel, equipment, and services to provide adequate veterinary care.
- Use of appropriate methods to prevent, control, diagnose, and treat diseases and injuries.
- Availability of emergency, weekend, and holiday care for animals.

- Daily observation of all animals by employees to assess the animals' health and well-being.
- Direct and frequent communication between the facility and attending veterinarian on any veterinary care concerns.
- Adequate guidance and training of personnel who care for animals regarding handling, immobilization, anesthesia, analgesia, tranquilization, and euthanasia.
- Provisions for adequate preprocedural and postprocedural care in accordance with established veterinary medical and nursing procedures.

The Role of the Attending Veterinarian

The attending veterinarian is responsible for reviewing the facility's veterinary care program at least once a year. Facilities must employ their veterinarians under the following terms:

- The facility must employ its veterinarian under formal arrangements on a full-time, part-time, or consulting basis. The facility owner must be able to prove employment of the veterinarian, either through a contract or other written documentation.
- If the veterinarian is part-time or consulting, the facility owner must prepare a written program of veterinary care. The owner must also schedule regular visits by the attending veterinarian at least once a year. The facility owner is solely responsible for scheduling these visits.
- The facility owner must give the veterinarian sufficient authority to ensure adequate veterinary care for the animals.

Specifics to Check For During a Veterinary Care Program Review

When conducting a review of a facility's veterinary care program, the attending veterinarian should check for vaccinations, parasite-control programs, euthanasia methods, exercise programs for dogs, environmental enrichment programs for primates, and several other specific provisions. The checklist on this tech note provides a detailed list of these provisions for use in evaluating specific veterinary care programs.

Additional Information

For more information, or if you have other questions about the veterinary care requirements under the Animal Welfare Act, contact your local APHIS Animal Care inspector or field veterinary medical officer, or:

Animal Care
APHIS, USDA
Unit 84
4700 River Road
Riverdale, MD 20737
Telephone: (301) 734-7833
E-mail: ace@usda.gov
Web page: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ac>

Veterinary Care Checklist

This checklist should be used when reviewing a facility's veterinary care program and kept on file at the facility for review by APHIS personnel.

Facility Name: _____

Date of Visit: _____

Review each item below with the facility owner. Place an "x" next to each item discussed and "N/A" next to those items that are not applicable.

- Vaccinations
- Parasite control program
- Emergency care
- Euthanasia methods
- Nutritive value of diets
- Handling of biologics and drugs
- Pest control and product safety
- Quarantine procedures
- Exercise program (dogs only)
- Environmental enrichment (primates only)
- Water quality (marine mammals only)
- Capture and restraint methods (wild or exotic animals only)
- General observations
 - overall facility condition
 - general animal husbandry practices

Comments and recommendations on overall health of animals and effectiveness of veterinary care program:

Signature of Attending Veterinarian:

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