



OVMA Position Statement – Rabies Clinics

OVMA opposes the holding of rabies clinics unless there is epidemiological evidence in and area of the province to support them. OVMA recommends that plans for these clinics be worked out locally between the local veterinary association and the health unit. OVMA recommends that such plans be established in abundance of an incident which presents the need for clinics. It is recommended that prices for clinics be negotiated locally. Where sufficient epidemiological evidence exists to warrant a rabies clinic, OVMA supports, as an alternative, the use of a form of voucher system similar to that implemented in Halton Region, conditional upon setting of the fee at an acceptable price.

Background:

OVMA is recommending that rabies clinics in Ontario be eliminated unless there is epidemiological evidence that they are required, for several reasons:

- 1) The health of pets being vaccinated may be endangered, or the vaccine may not be effective, because no physical examination takes place before the vaccination is given.

A physical examination should always be performed on a pet before a vaccination is given, for a variety of reasons.

- Rabies vaccinations should never be given to pregnant animals, as maternally-derived antibodies will interfere with the vaccine.
- The pet may be suffering from an immunosuppressive ailment, and become ill as a result of the vaccine.
- Concurrent illness, chemotherapy treatments, or certain drugs (e.g. tetracycline) may inhibit the immune response to the vaccine, rendering it ineffective.

To rule out these possibilities, the vaccination should be administered only after a veterinarian has thoroughly examined the animal and reviewed its medical records. As physical examinations are not performed in rabies clinics, and as the animal's health records are not available, the animal's health may be put at risk, or the vaccine may not produce the desired immunity, if the animal is vaccinated in a rabies clinic.

- 2) The annual nature of rabies clinics increases the risk of contracting rabies for dogs under one year of age.

The availability of annual rabies clinics unfortunately leads some pet owners not to vaccinate their pets until the next rabies clinic. As a result, a significant number of pets are left unprotected from this deadly disease while their owners wait for the next low cost

clinic. Many pets are not vaccinated because they are either too young, or missed the last clinic and have to wait an extended period for the next opportunity. In this case, the unprotected animal is at risk until the next rabies clinic.

- 3) Rabies clinics mislead the public into thinking that an annual rabies vaccination is all there is to pet care, and decrease the likelihood that health problems will be detected at an early stage.

By the very nature of rabies clinics, the attending veterinarian does not assess the health of the animal, and does not check or vaccinate for other diseases. In areas where rabies clinics are popular, the lack of regular pet health maintenance makes the pet population at risk for panleukopenia and parvovirus infection. Taking rabies vaccinations away from rabies clinics and putting them into private veterinary clinics would help ensure all pets are receiving regular health maintenance.

Under the Halton voucher system, pet owners may obtain a low cost rabies vaccination voucher from the Regional Health Unit after signing a declaration that they cannot afford to pay for a physical examination plus vaccinations. The pet owner then takes the voucher to any veterinary clinic in the region. Upon presentation of the voucher and payment of the required fee, the pet owner may obtain a rabies vaccination without paying for or obtaining a physical examination.

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