Rabies Vaccination Protocol

Per Virginia Law, any pet not current on Rabies will be updated during their visit with us unless the Veterinarian deems the pet not physically healthy enough to receive said vaccine. Please review the law below directly taken from the Virginia Department of Health and sign at the end.

III. DOMESTIC ANIMALS

A. Vaccination (this section refers to routine or preexposure vaccination; not postexposure vaccination, which is discussed in B. Postexposure Management)

1. Dogs and Cats

a. Legal requirement for vaccination: The Code of Virginia requires that all dogs and cats receive rabies vaccine prior to attaining 4 months of age (§ 3.2-6521). A licensed veterinarian or a licensed veterinary technician under the immediate and direct supervision of a veterinarian must administer the vaccine.

b. Rabies Clinics: Animal rabies clinics that are held at a site that is not licensed by the Board of Veterinary Medicine fall under a special exception in the Code (§ 3.2-6521). To comply with the Veterinary Practice Act, a veterinarian who administers vaccine at such clinics should ensure that the local governing body and health department have approved the clinic. See Attachment 5 for more information about rabies clinics.

c. Licensing linked to vaccination: The Code of Virginia requires that all dogs be licensed by 4 months of age and allows counties, cities and towns to require licensing of cats (§ 3.2-6524). Section 3.2-6526 of the Code of Virginia indicates that in order to be licensed, evidence of rabies vaccination that is satisfactory to the licensing agent must be shown to the person issuing the license (§ 3.2-6526). In most localities this would be the county clerk. As per § 3.2-6521, rabies vaccine exemptions are now available in Virginia (see subsection i of this section below) and so exemption certificates may now be presented in lieu of a rabies vaccination certificate in order to purchase a license.

d. Vaccine labels: USDA is the federal agency that approves vaccines and the language for their labels. Most vaccines for dogs and cats are labeled 8 for animals as young as 3 months, but there are vaccines for cats that can be used as early as eight weeks (see list of vaccines in Attachment 3).

e. Regimen: No matter what the age at initial vaccination, the second vaccination should be administered within a year regardless of whether the initial vaccine had 1 year or 3 year duration of immunity. If vaccine approved by the USDA for 3 or 4 years duration of immunity is used, triennial or quadrennial booster vaccinations can be administered beginning with the second vaccination, even if the second vaccination is overdue or early. For the most part, the initial vaccination should occur between 3 and 4 months of age, however, there are some vaccines now available for cats that can be given as early as 8 weeks of age.

f. Vaccinations not current: If the animal is overdue for a booster vaccination, it does not have to start the series again. No matter how long overdue, if a vaccine labeled for 3 or 4 years duration is given, a certificate for 3 or 4 years can be written. However, an animal is not considered immunized for at least 28 days after the initial vaccination is administered, but with any subsequent vaccination the animal is considered current immediately.

g. Triennial vs. annual vaccinations: There is no evidence that administering vaccine every year is more protective than using a triennial vaccine every three years. In general, VDH encourages the use of triennial vaccines after the initial vaccination. However, there are vaccines for cats that are labeled for annual use that may be preferred by some veterinarians because they are thought to be less likely to cause negative side effects and their use should not be discouraged.

h. Titers in lieu of vaccination: Rabies antibody titers are indicative of an animal's response to vaccine or infection. Titers do not directly correlate with protection because other immunologic factors also play a role in preventing rabies, and our abilities to measure and interpret those other factors are not well developed. Therefore, evidence of circulating rabies virus antibodies should not be used as a substitute for current vaccination in managing rabies exposures or determining the need for booster vaccinations in animals.

i. Vaccine exemptions and rabies regulations: Virginia's rabies regulations, in part, provide for an exemption to rabies vaccinations for dogs and cats "if a vaccination would likely endanger the animal's life due to a previously diagnosed disease or other previously documented medical considerations as documented by a licensed veterinarian." This exemption is designed to create a mechanism whereby owners could still obtain a county or city license without having to produce a current rabies certificate; however, it is important to keep in mind that for the purposes of rabies exposure response, an exempted animal will be considered unvaccinated. The entire text of Virginia's rabies regulations can be found at http://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title12/agency5/chapter105.

A guidance document has been developed to assist veterinarians with the process of rabies vaccine exemptions which discusses the language of the law associated with exemptions and examples of certain conditions for which an exemption may be appropriate.

A standard application form has also been developed for this process. Veterinarians interested in applying for an exemption should discuss the process by which they can apply with their local health departments.

A directory of local health departments can be found at http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/local-health-districts/. The guidance document for veterinarians considering applying for an exemption as well as the standardized application for can be found at http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/environmental-epidemiology/rabies-2/rabies-foranimal-healthcare-providers/. Veterinarians are also encouraged to contact their local health departments to report exposures or if they have questions about any of the regulatory language.

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Client signature   Date