



State of Wisconsin

Veterinary Examining Board

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Guidance Document VEB-GD-013

Vaccination by Animal Shelters

Wis. Stat. §§ 89.02 (6), 95.21 (2) (a), 173.41 (1) (b), 173.41 (10m)

1/27/26

Topic

At many shelters core vaccinations (such as distemper, parvo, feline viral rhinotracheitis, panleukopenia, bordetella, and parainfluenza virus) are administered by shelter staff upon intake of the animal. These vaccinations are not administered by a veterinarian or under the supervision of a veterinarian, as most shelters do not have a full-time veterinarian on staff that is available to administer or supervise the administration of these core vaccinations.

These vaccinations are administered to animals brought into shelters to prevent severe disease outbreaks in the shelters. Shelter animals are at an increased risk of infectious disease due to risk factors that include stressors, exposure to other animals, age, previous preventive care, and pathogen levels in the environment.

Administering these vaccinations upon intake is supported by:

- The Association of Shelter Veterinarians (ASV), <https://jsmcah.org/index.php/jasv/article/view/42/19>
- The American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) <https://www.aaha.org/resources/2022-aaha-canine-vaccination-guidelines/>, AAEP <https://www.aaha.org/resources/2020-aahaaafp-feline-vaccination-guidelines/>
- The World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) <https://wsava.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/WSAVA-Vaccination-guidelines-2024.pdf>

Relevant Statutes and Administrative Code

Wisconsin Stat. § 89.02 (6) defines the practice of veterinary medicine as to examine into the fact or cause of animal health, disease or physical condition, or to treat, operate, prescribe or advise for the same, or to undertake, offer, advertise, announce, or hold out in any manner to do any of said acts, for compensation, direct or indirect, or in the expectation thereof.

Wisconsin Stat. §95.21 (2) (a) requires that a dog be vaccinated against rabies by a veterinarian or, if a veterinarian is physically present at the location the vaccine is administered, by a certified veterinary technician.

Wisconsin Stat. § 173.41 (10m) allows an entity licensed under ch. ATPC 16, Wis. Admin. Code, to have a dog kept by the licensee vaccinated by an individual that is not a veterinarian, unless prohibited by law (rabies).

Under Wis. Stat. § 173.41 (1) (b), “Animal shelter” means a facility that is operated for the purpose of providing for and promoting the welfare, protection, and humane treatment of animals, that is used to shelter at least 25 dogs a year, and that is operated by a humane society, animal welfare society, animal rescue group, or

other nonprofit group. For the purposes of this guidance, a facility is considered a shelter regardless of whether it shelters at least 25 dogs a year.

Board Position

The practice of shelter staff administering vaccinations, with the exception of the rabies vaccination, upon intake to an animal shelter, is not consider the practice of veterinary medicine due to the following reason:

- The shelter staff are not administering the vaccinations for compensation, either direct or indirect. The administration of vaccines is done strictly to ensure health of the animals being taken in, and of the animals in the current population, and is a best practice for shelter medicine.
- The shelter staff administer the vaccinations to animals they either have ownership of or they have custody and control over when the ownership is unknown.

Shelter staff may not administer vaccinations to animals they do not have ownership of, unless the ownership is unknown and they have custody and control of the animal.

Shelters may not charge for the vaccinations as discussed above. Vaccinations administered by a licensed veterinarian or the licensed veterinarian's staff in accordance with ch. VE 1, Wis. Admin. Code, may be billed.

Shelter staff may not administer a rabies vaccination unless done in compliance with Wis. Stat. § 95.21 (2) (a).