

# Canine Rabies Vaccination Exemptions

## Background

On January 1, 2012 California State Law began allowing rabies vaccination exemptions for dogs if approved by the Local Health Officer (LHO). In some counties in California, the LHO has delegated the responsibility to an animal control agency. In most of LA County (except Pasadena, Long Beach and Vernon) requests are reviewed by VPH.

The law states that an exemption may be granted for the rabies vaccine, if “a rabies vaccination would endanger the dog’s life.” It also requires that the condition warranting the exemption be documented. This state law applies for **dogs only**. Local

jurisdictions may enact similar requirements for licensing of cats. To check which cities in LA County require cat licensing and rabies vaccination, see page 24. The entire law is available at:

[leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes.xhtml](http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes.xhtml). Click on the Health and Safety Code. Then enter for Code: HSC and Section: 121690.



## What You Need To KNOW

- In the first year this law came into effect, our office worked to develop consistent standards for reviewing requests, referring to published literature on adverse reactions to rabies vaccinations in dogs.
- In 2014, VPH received 154 requests. We approved 35% and rejected 51%. The remaining 14% were misdirected requests (wrong jurisdiction or rabies vaccine exemption requests for cats).
- The exemption is valid for one year only, after which the dog must either be vaccinated for rabies or another full request must be submitted and approved.
- If the exemption is approved, the dog must be confined to the owner’s premises or must be on a leash not exceeding six feet in length and under the direct control of an adult. The dog should have no contact with any dog or cat that is not currently vaccinated against rabies.
- For dogs living in LA County (except Pasadena, Long Beach, or Vernon), canine rabies vaccination exemption requests are submitted by a veterinarian to our program. See below for details.
  - For dogs living in Pasadena, contact the Pasadena Humane Society at 626-792-7151.
  - For dogs living in Long Beach, contact Long Beach Animal Care Services, at 562-570-7387, or visit: [longbeach.gov/acs/pet-laws-and-licensing/canine-rabies-exemption/](http://longbeach.gov/acs/pet-laws-and-licensing/canine-rabies-exemption/)
  - For dogs living in Vernon, contact the Southeast Area Animal control authority (SEAACA) at 562-803-3301
- Rabies vaccine exemption requests must come from veterinarians only, not from dog owners.
- Cat owners should contact their city to inquire about procedures for getting an exemption.
- Cases where an exemption **may be approved** include:
  - Life-threatening anaphylactic reaction soon after administration of a rabies vaccine
    - Signs consistent with anaphylactic shock
    - Mild facial angioedema, hives, or localized reactions do not qualify as life-threatening.



- Immune-Mediated Hemolytic Anemia (IMHA), if:
  - Dog is still within first year after diagnosis, or
  - Onset was within 1 month of a rabies vaccination, or
  - More than one episode (i.e. documented relapses)
- Polyradiculoneuropathy if:
  - Dog is still within the first year after diagnosis, or
  - Onset was within 1 month after rabies vaccination.
- Dog currently on immunosuppressive therapy for cancer or immune-mediated disease
  - Low dose prednisone is not considered immunosuppressive therapy.
- Terminal prognosis (dog has fewer than 3 months to live in the opinion of presiding veterinarian)
- Exemptions **will NOT be approved** in the following cases:
  - Old age
  - Positive rabies titers
  - Minor or moderate reactions to rabies vaccination
  - Reaction to vaccinations other than rabies
  - Medical condition not documented or no documentation submitted.
  - Short-term exemptions (e.g. 1 month exemption for recovery from acute illness). In such cases, work with the Animal Control or other licensing agency to request a temporary delay.
  - Illegible requests
- We strive to respond to exemption requests within 5 business days.

## What You Need To DO

- Inform your clients that, if their exemption request is approved, their dog:
  - Will be considered at higher risk for contracting rabies and will be considered legally unvaccinated. This means the animal will be subject to a California state-mandated 180 day quarantine if exposed to a wild animal rather than just 30 days.
  - Must be kept at home, or on a 6 foot long leash controlled by an adult.
  - Cannot live with other unvaccinated animals.
- In order to apply for an exemption, a veterinarian must fill out the **both forms on page 49 and 50**.
  - Submit the forms with up to 5 pages of the medical records documenting the dog's condition.
- Respond to any requests from us for additional information (usually sent by fax).
- Provide copies of the final document (Approved or Not Approved) to your client.

