

Imported Puppies and Public Health

We Need YOUR Help

Background

Puppy mills have gone global. Recently the number of puppies being imported into the United States has tripled (1). In California, most of the imported puppies are destined for Los Angeles County (2). Over 100 dogs arrive at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) every month. The threat of importing diseases into Los Angeles County with these animals is real, as evidenced by the importation of two separate rabid domestic pets while they were visibly sick (2004 – dog from Thailand; 1987 – cat from Mexico). Other animals imported into the United States have been diagnosed with Monkey Pox, leishmaniasis, screw worm infestations, distemper, and parvovirus.



Photo: VPH staff

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is the federal agency in charge of regulating imported dogs and cats. Los Angeles County Veterinary Public Health (VPH) now assists the CDC with inspections of some animals at LAX to verify the health status of animals and their ages. Then VPH compares the age with the accompanying paperwork. VPH also enforces local dog importation quarantines within Los Angeles County.



Photo: VPH staff

Current rabies regulations for imported dogs

By law, dogs imported from countries with canine rabies must be confined at home until one month after the rabies vaccination. The legal age of rabies vaccination for dogs in USA is three months. Discuss with your veterinarian the best age to vaccinate your dog against rabies. The dog is then confined at home for 30 days following vaccination and released from quarantine (assuming compliance) at approximately four months of age. VPH helps enforce this in Los Angeles County.



What You Need to KNOW

- **Many of the puppies are under 2 months of age** and several arrive dehydrated and with low blood sugar. Some are infected with diseases that can be given to people.
- The most commonly imported breeds are **Yorkshire terrier, Maltese, and English and French bulldogs.**
- The most common regions of origin are East Asia, Eastern Europe and South America, with the most common countries being **South Korea, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, and Colombia.** Most of the countries of origin have prevalent dog rabies.
- Some of imported puppies arriving through LAX have **fraudulent paperwork** overstating the dog's age, presumably to avoid federal quarantine laws.
- **Frequent importers have websites that advertise the puppies as being bred domestically.** As a result, many new owners do not know that their new puppy is from another country.



Photo: VPH staff

What You Need to DO

- **Inquire about the origin of the puppy.** If the new puppy owner did not see the parents of the puppy, it could be imported.
- **Have your veterinarian check the teeth to verify age of puppy,** and verify that the real age matches the paperwork. This is especially important before giving the rabies vaccine.
- **If the puppy is sick, consider foreign animal diseases, including rabies.** If your veterinarian suspects rabies or any other infectious disease in the puppy, they should report it to VPH immediately.
- **Proper cleaning habits:** wash hands after handling the puppy, pick up and discard feces immediately, and don't bring the puppy around other animals until puppy is confirmed to be healthy and fully vaccinated.

For More Information

1. Ehnert K, Kim-Farley R. Reducing Zoonoses: Controlling Animal Importation. Public Health Practice – What Works. Oxford Press; 2013. P. 162-171.
2. Ehnert K, Galland GG. Border Health: Who's Guarding the Gate? Vet Clin Small Anim 2009;39:359-372.

