

# Canine Rabies Vaccination Exemptions

## POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Canine rabies vaccination exemption requests must be submitted by the veterinarian, not the dog owner.
- A complete exemption request includes BOTH forms (pg 28-29), dog owner's signature, veterinarian's signature AND up to 5 pages of medical records documenting the dog's medical condition related to the request. Incomplete exemption requests will be denied.
- Only health conditions that fit the evidence-based criteria for exemption may be approved (see below).
- Dogs approved for a rabies vaccine exemption are considered unvaccinated and must abide by rabies laws for unvaccinated pets.
- Exemptions are only valid for 1-year. Permanent exemptions do not exist.
- California does not accept positive rabies titers in lieu of a rabies vaccine.
- These exemptions are for dogs only. Contact your local animal control for cat-related rabies vaccine or licensing concerns.

## BACKGROUND

On January 1, 2012 California State Law began allowing rabies vaccination exemptions for dogs if approved by the Local Health Officer (LHO) in each county. In some counties in California, the LHO has delegated the responsibility to an animal control agency. In most of Los Angeles 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 pg 24. The entire law is available at: [leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes.xhtml](http://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes.xhtml). Click on the Health and Safety Code. Then enter for Code: HSC and Section: 121690.



In the first year this law came into effect, our office worked to develop consistent standards for reviewing requests, referring to published evidence of adverse reactions to rabies vaccinations in dogs. Our office continues to review scientific literature and update our criteria for exemption as needed.

In 2018, VPH received 172 requests. We approved 52% and declined 44%. The remaining 4% were misdirected requests (wrong jurisdiction or rabies vaccination exemption requests for cats).

### Cases where an exemption may be approved

- 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
  - Must be specifically documented in the medical record

### Cases where an exemption will not be approved

- Old age
- Positive rabies antibody titers (California does not recognize rabies titers in lieu of a rabies vaccine)
- Minor or moderate reactions (including injection site reactions) to rabies vaccination
- Reaction to vaccinations other than rabies
- History of neoplasia and dog is not currently on immunosuppressive therapy
- 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 or incomplete requests

### What to do after an exemption request is approved or denied

- Provide copies of the final document (Approved or Denied) to your client.
- 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 confined at home, or on a 6 foot long leash controlled by an adult.
  - Cannot live or have contact with other animals not vaccinated for rabies.
- 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.



## **Ready to submit a canine rabies vaccination exemption request? Follow these steps:**

- For dogs living in LA County (except Pasadena, Long Beach, or Vernon), canine rabies vaccination exemption requests are submitted by a veterinarian (not the dog owner) 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
  - Cat owners should contact their city to inquire about procedures for getting an exemption.
- Complete and submit **BOTH forms (see pg 28-29) AND up to 5 pages of medical records** documenting the dog's medical condition related to the request. Incomplete submissions will be automatically denied.
- Forms are also available by request by calling our office at 213-288-7060 or email [vet@ph.lacounty.gov](mailto:vet@ph.lacounty.gov).
- VPH strives to process the request within 5 business days and return the approved or denied request to the veterinarian by fax or email.
  - Outside of that timeframe, if you do not hear back from VPH about a submitted request, please call our office at 213-288-7060.



**VETERINARIANS:**

**Please contact VPH for additional copies of the  
Canine Rabies Vaccination Exemption forms.**

Phone: 213-288-7060

Email: [vet@ph.lacounty.gov](mailto:vet@ph.lacounty.gov)

