



# Veterinary Supervision in Animal Shelters

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The Association of Shelter Veterinarians believes it is in the best interests of community and animal health for every shelter to have a formal relationship with a veterinarian with *direct knowledge* of the organization, its population, and its facilities.

Preventive health care protocols should be developed in consultation with this veterinarian and may be implemented by trained shelter staff under indirect supervision. Preventive medicine includes care for the specific purposes of controlling infectious diseases, preventing environmental contamination, and reducing animal fear, stress, and related negative emotional states. Examples include vaccination, prophylactic control of endo- and ecto-parasites, diagnostic testing for zoonotic and infectious diseases, identification and isolation of animals with clinical signs of infectious diseases, and enrichment and environmental management practices designed to reduce stress.

Providing treatment for common medical and behavioral conditions by trained shelter staff may also occur under indirect supervision as long as tasks are in compliance with a written protocol developed in consultation with the veterinarian.<sup>1</sup> Treatment of individuals or groups of animals may also be performed under telephonic or written instruction from the veterinarian.

In jurisdictions requiring *direct supervision* for all care provided to shelter animals, shelters are encouraged to advocate for broader care provisions in order to protect the health and welfare of animals in shelters.

## Definitions

*Direct supervision* means a licensed veterinarian is readily available on the premises where the patient is being treated and has assumed responsibility for the veterinary care given to the patient by a person working under his or her direction.<sup>1</sup>

*Indirect supervision* means a licensed veterinarian need not be on the premises; has given either written or oral instructions for treatment of the patient; is readily available by telephone or other forms of immediate communication; and has assumed responsibility for the veterinary care given to the patient by a person working under his or her direction.<sup>1</sup>

*Direct knowledge* means the veterinarian regularly visits and examines the shelter population in person.

*Written protocol* refers to a document detailing key information in the standard provision of care for a particular condition or procedure. Examples of sub-sections include, but are not limited to, shelter policy, disease recognition, dose and route of administration of pharmaceutical products, diagnostic testing, environmental risk, response to adverse treatment effects, product storage and handling, and documentation.

## References

1. 2019 AVMA Model Practice Act. Accessed June 2021.  
<https://www.avma.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/model-veterinary-practice-act.pdf>

The mission of the ASV is to advance and support the practice of shelter medicine in order to improve community animal health and well-being.