



Animal Care Tech Note

The Attending Veterinarian

As an attending veterinarian, you are one of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) most important partners in assuring the humane care and treatment of animals. Your role is more comprehensive than providing medical care to sick animals. You are also responsible for providing important guidance to help licensees and registrants keep their animals healthy.

Authority

Facilities regulated under the Animal Welfare Act must hire an attending veterinarian and give them adequate authority to ensure animal health and well-being. This means regulated facilities must inform you of any animal health issues and follow your guidance and instructions. Your authority also includes access to all animals and resources needed to manage care. For example, facilities must make appropriate staffing, facilities, and equipment for adequate veterinary care available, including areas to safely handle animals and any needed capture equipment.

Scope of Duties

In addition to providing medical care, the attending veterinarian is responsible for:

- **Visiting the facility** as often as needed to ensure animals are receiving adequate care. Visits must occur at least annually at facilities with dogs.
- Working with the facility to **establish effective health and husbandry practices**. Topics to consider include:
 - Appropriate ventilation, temperature and humidity, sanitation, and animal density
 - Routine health monitoring
 - Nutrition, especially for exotic species
 - Pest and vector control measures
 - External and internal parasite control
 - Effective biosecurity practices
 - Proper use, storage, and handling of medications, including analgesics/sedatives
 - Safe handling practices, including capture and restraint for wild or difficult animals
 - Euthanasia methods
 - Dental care
 - Reproduction, neonatal care, and management of congenital conditions



- Documenting your guidance in a **written program of veterinary care**. This is the best way to ensure your guidance is followed. A written program is required for:
 - **Dogs**, including a vaccination schedule, parasite sampling and treatment schedule, and directions for maintaining healthy coats, nails, eyes, ears, skin, and teeth.
 - All covered animals, when the **attending veterinarian is employed part time**.
- **Overseeing or carrying out other requirements for specific species:**

Dogs	A written exercise plan Annual physical exams (complete exam from head to tail) Medical records (maintained by the facility)
Nonhuman Primates	A written environment enhancement plan for psychological well-being
Marine Mammals	Housing including size, social grouping, and water quality Regular physical exams and visual assessments Necropsy of all marine mammals that die in captivity

While the Animal Welfare Act gives attending veterinarians broad authority, the licensee or registrant is the one ultimately held responsible for complying with the law.

Learn More

For more information on the role of attending veterinarians, visit www.aphis.usda.gov/animalwelfare/av.