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NVAP Reference Guide: Issuing International Health Certificates for Live Animal Movement

Last Modified:

International Health Certificates (IHC)

International Health Certificates (IHCs) are often required by foreign countries when live animals, including germplasm and hatching eggs, are exported from the United States. Export requirements are determined by the country of destination, with IHCs containing animal identification and health information at a minimum. In the U.S., all IHCs for animals are issued (completed, signed and dated) by a clinical veterinarian. The credentials required of the issuing veterinarian depend on the species of animal being exported and the requirements of the importing (destination) country. Some IHCs can be issued by a State-licensed veterinarian but many must be issued by a veterinarian who is also USDA accredited. When USDA accreditation is required to issue an IHC, veterinarians working with livestock, horses, food or fiber animals, bird species, farm-raised aquatic animals, and zoo animals that can transmit exotic animal diseases to livestock must be Category II USDA Accredited. Veterinarians working with all other animals, including pets other than birds, may issue IHCs as a Category I USDA Accredited Veterinarian.

Before issuance of an IHC, the veterinarian must complete all required pre-travel physical examinations for the animals being exported, verify herd status where

applicable, and ensure vaccines, treatments, and laboratory tests are complete. By signing and dating an IHC, the issuing veterinarian takes responsibility for the completeness and accuracy of the information documented on it.

Most importing countries require IHCs to be endorsed (counter-signed and embossed/ stamped) by APHIS after they have been issued by a clinical veterinarian. APHIS endorsement involves an official review process of the IHC and all supporting documents. When an APHIS veterinarian reviews documents for endorsement, he or she:

- Verifies the animal meets the importing country's requirements as far as can be determined;
- Verifies any required inspections/exams, vaccines, treatments, laboratory tests, and certifications were completed by a veterinarian authorized to do the work; and
- Verifies that the IHC is complete and accurate as far as can be determined.

Once verification is complete, the IHC is endorsed. After a certificate is endorsed, the certificate and supporting documents are returned to the practitioner or exporter.

Time Constraints

Sufficient time must be allowed to arrange for exported animals to be isolated before travel if required, for required treatments, to obtain test results, and meet other requirements for export. Be sure that your client knows and understands these time constraints, as some pre-export requirements take months.

Certification Statements

A certification statement is a statement included on the IHC or in the export protocol of a given country to which the veterinarian issuing the IHC attests. Statements are often related to the health of the animal being exported or the disease status of the place the animal is from. Attestation to these statements is done via signature (issuance) of the IHC by the veterinarian. IHCs should not be issued until all requirements of the importing country have been met.

If a particular country requires a country-specific health certificate, the required certification statements will be included on that certificate as found on APHIS' International Regulations for Animal Export or Pet Travel Website (linked below). If a pre-completed country-specific IHC is not available, certification statements must be added to a generic health certificate (e.g. VS or APHIS form appropriate for the animal being exported) before being issuance. All certification statements should be typed exactly as they appear in the requirements received from APHIS.

Herd Certification Statements for Livestock

Frequently, certification statements must be made by the owner or agent of the animals, usually for both the herd of origin and the animals from the herd that are to be exported.

When herd certification statements are required by the importing country for periods greater than the time spent at assembly points (points where two or more groups of animals are brought together to be exported as one group), the exporter and accredited veterinarian will be required to obtain proper certification statements on the herd health status for all premises where the animals have been located during the time frame specified. For example, if the destination country requires certification statements for the last 120 days, and the animals were on two premises during the 120 days before assembly, the certification statements would need to be prepared for each premises, including the assembly premises.

If more than one veterinarian is involved in the preparation of the animal(s) for export, each must provide certification statements on the health certificate or an addendum letter of the performed tests or vaccinations, as well as the location where such inspections, tests, or vaccinations were performed. Work performed by non-accredited veterinarians is not acceptable for inclusion. If you have any questions about certifying work that was done by another accredited veterinarian, call your APHIS –VS endorsement office (see link at the end of this section) for instructions.

Laboratory Tests

Laboratory test results must be included when an IHC is submitted to an APHIS-Veterinary Services office for endorsement. Often, original reports or carbon copies of reports are required. In certain situations, with prior APHIS approval, test results can be faxed or e-mailed directly from the testing laboratory to the VS endorsement office.

Test results must be in alignment with the requirements of the importing country (e.g. type of test, timing of test). The animal identification details on the test results must clearly match the animal identification details on the IHC to be acceptable. The testing date documented on the IHC for intradermal TB tests (e.g. caudal fold tests) should be the test read date. All other test dates should be recorded to reflect the sample draw date (e.g. the day blood was drawn).

When an export protocol or IHC requires a test to be run in an “approved” lab, tests may be performed by university, state, or federal laboratories. Private or commercial laboratories may qualify; please work with your local VS endorsement office for more information on laboratories able to conduct pre-export testing.

Official retests must be conducted in the same laboratory where the initial test was performed. Contact your APHIS –VS endorsement office or visit the Approved Laboratories website below for a list of approved laboratories.

Veterinary Services’ National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) in Ames, IA will conduct export-qualifying tests for dourine, glanders, and piroplasmosis and other tests that are not available from other laboratories. All submissions to NVSL must be accompanied by a VS Form 10–4, Laboratory Submission Form. See NVSL’s website link below for more details.

Rabies antibody titer tests for export of pet animals are most commonly performed at Kansas State University, the DoD Food Analysis and Diagnostic Laboratory (at Fort Sam Houston), or CDC Rabies Laboratory.

Commonly Used International Export Certificates

Most countries now require country-specific certificates for many species. For the most up-to-date documents and requirements for each country, check the below websites prior to each export. The International Regulations for Animal Export web

site contains information for livestock, poultry, horses and some other animals, while the Pet Travel web site contains regulations relating to dogs, cats and other common pet animals. If a country-specific certificate does not exist on either of these web pages, please contact your local VS endorsement office. A link to contact information is included below. You may then be directed to use one of the following generic international health certificate forms:

- VS Form 17–140, U.S. Origin Health Certificate for the export of livestock, embryos, semen, and horses for immediate slaughter.
- VS Form 17-145, U.S. Origin Health Certificate for the Export of Horses From the United States to Canada.
- VS Form 17–6, Certificate for Poultry or Hatching Eggs for Export
- APHIS Form 7001, U.S. Interstate and International Certificate of Health Examination for Small Animals.

Do not use any of these generic forms without first confirming the importing country's requirements for the species being exported.

Always remember you must ensure that livestock to be exported meet the minimum U.S. livestock export requirements, which may be more than the receiving country requires. These requirements can be found in the Code of Federal Regulations, 9 CFR Part 91 and the Program Handbook (632.74 KB).

Related Links

- International Regulations for Animal Export (other than pets)
- Pet Travel website
- Approved laboratories
- Veterinary Services National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL)
- 9 CFR Part 91
- Program Handbook (632.74 KB)
- VS endorsement office

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