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USDA-Accredited Veterinarians: Certifying Animals for International Travel (Export)

Last Modified:

How To Electronically Issue Health Certificates

USDA accepts international health certificates for animals traveling to another country that are electronically completed, signed by USDA-accredited veterinarians, and submitted to USDA for endorsement through the Veterinary Export Health Certification System (VEHCS).

Some countries also accept health certificates that are digitally endorsed by USDA in VEHCS. In those cases, the health certificate can be issued (signed by the USDA-accredited veterinarian) and endorsed (countersigned and embossed/stamped by USDA), and returned after endorsement entirely online.

Visit Country Acceptance List for VEHCS to determine if and how VEHCS can be used for your health certificate. If the destination country isn't on the list, learn what to do at Pet Travel: Unknown Requirements or Live Animal Exports (see “If your country is not listed…” under “Country Requirements”).



This page is for USDA-accredited veterinarians to learn about certifying animals for international travel (export), completing and submitting health certificates for USDA endorsement, and using the Veterinary Export Health Certification System (VEHCS).

How To Issue Export Health Certificates

What Is Considered a Pet?

A pet is a privately owned companion animal not intended for research or resale and includes only certain animal groups.

The animal doesn't qualify for pet travel and is subject to different import regulations and export regulations if you:

- Don't see the pet listed below.
- Are exporting semen or embryos from any animal.

- Have a pet that's considered livestock or poultry, like pigs or chickens.

The following animals qualify as pets, meaning they're subject to pet travel requirements:

- Dogs
- Cats
- Ferrets
- Rabbits
- Rodents
- Hedgehogs/Tenrecs
- Reptiles
- Amphibians
- Birds (not all types—see below)

The following birds DON'T qualify as pets, meaning they're subject to different regulations:

Because they may carry and transmit certain diseases to the U.S. poultry industry, these birds are regulated as poultry.

- Chickens
- Doves
- Ducks
- Geese
- Grouse
- Guinea fowl
- Partridges
- Pea fowl
- Pheasants
- Pigeons
- Quail
- Swans
- Turkeys

View import regulations and export regulations if the type of animal does not qualify as a pet.

Expand All

Know Your Responsibilities as an Accredited Veterinarian

The responsibilities of an accredited veterinarian issuing health certificates are outlined in 9 CFR 161.4 Standards for Accredited Veterinarian Duties.

Before issuing a health certificate, YOU must ensure that the:

- Correct and most current version of the health certificate, for the animal species and destination country, is being used.
- Animal meets **all requirements** of the destination country. Check requirements for:
  - Pet Travel (see definition of a pet)
  - Live Animal Exports (non-pets)
- Health certificate is issued within the timeframe required by the destination country.
- Health certificate includes required and accurate information.

If the animal's destination country doesn't appear in the list, it's the owner/exporter's responsibility to contact the pertinent government official in the destination country to obtain those requirements. You'll need to review the requirements and ensure the animal meets them before issuing the health certificate. If you have any questions about this process or need further guidance, email questions to your USDA endorsement office.

Check Your Accreditation Status

Please ensure your USDA Veterinary Accreditation is current, and that you have the correct category of USDA Veterinary Accreditation to issue the type of live animal export health certificate you are issuing. There are **two ways** to check your USDA Veterinary Accreditation status:

1. Use the National Veterinary Accreditation Program (NVAP) Lookup Tool

Select “Check my accreditation status.” Enter your National Accreditation Number (NAN) and last name.

2. Contact your State's NVAP Coordinator

You should also contact your State's NVAP Coordinator if the information displayed on the NVAP Lookup Tool doesn't match your understanding of your accreditation status (for example, your status is other than accredited, or you're not accredited in the State where you're currently practicing).

Best Practices for Preparing Animals To Meet Country-Specific Requirements

- View this presentation for an overview of APHIS' role in the international export of animals.
- If the animal is a pet, have your client provide you with a completed Pet Owner Worksheet for Preparing Visit With Accredited Veterinarian To Complete Health Certificate (102.11 KB).
- Review the animal’s medical records. Obtain previous records if this is a new patient or if another veterinary clinic requires medical information to complete the health certificate.
- Carefully review the requirements for your client's destination country for pets or live animals other than pets. To view the most recent updates to country requirements, check out the History of Requirement Updates for Live Animal Exports.
- Determine any identification, vaccinations, testing, or treatments that must be performed. This includes when they must be performed and in what sequence, making note of when the animal must be examined and the health certificate issued based on the travel or shipment date and destination country requirements.
- DO NOT issue a health certificate if the animal doesn't completely meet requirements of the destination country.
- View guidance on how to complete a VEHCS-style health certificate (321.16 KB) .

    - **Note:** The example above is for a pet, but the general approach can be used for any live animal export.
- Check whether the animal will be returning to the United States and verify import requirements with both APHIS and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). There may be requirements that need to be performed prior to leaving the United States in order to return.
    - CDC is the primary authority for dogs imported into the United States. For requirements, visit the CDC website.
    - **Alert:** CDC requires all U.S.-vaccinated dogs that have traveled to a high-risk country for rabies within the past 6 months to have a "Certification of U.S.-Issued Rabies Vaccination" form. This form must be submitted by a USDA-accredited veterinarian and endorsed by USDA **before** the dog leaves the United States.

Submitting Health Certificates for APHIS Endorsement

Your APHIS endorsement office can accept and endorse a health certificate. You can submit your health certificate via:

Option 1: Veterinary Export Health Certification System (VEHCS). For more information, view how to electronically issue health certificates.

OR

Option 2: Shipping. For more information, select the State or U.S. Territory you're located in to find your APHIS endorsement office.

We charge fees to endorse health certificates. Learn more about APHIS fees for endorsing health certificates for pets and other animals (non-pets).

Preventing Endorsement Delays

- Complete all fields of the health certificate, taking care to accurately provide all information required in each field.

    - Only provide required information in the health certificate. For example, if the destination country only requires a rabies vaccination, don't provide information on any other vaccinations administered to the animal.
    - If a field of the health certificate is lined out or asterisked, don't complete that field.
    - If you make a mistake when completing the health certificate outside of VEHCS, start over or draw a single line through the incorrect information and initial it. If the mistake is made within VEHCS, correct it within the system.
- Double check the information you entered in the health certificate, ensuring that the animal's description, identification, vaccination, testing, and treatments match your medical records and any other supporting documentation exactly.
- Double check that you followed the destination country's requirements exactly. For example, if internal parasite treatment is required, a fecal exam isn't a substitute.
- If you didn’t administer a required vaccination or perform a required test, obtain and retain medical records documenting the administration from the veterinarian who did.
- Double check that you signed and printed your name and dated the health certificate for the actual day you issued it.
- Make sure the submission package is complete, including the finished health certificate, supporting documentation for required vaccinations and testing (when applicable), import permit issued by the destination country (when applicable), payment, and a prepaid return shipping label (for nondigitally endorsed health certificates).
- DO NOT issue the health certificate if the destination country requirements aren't met.

What To Do If an Airline Doesn't Accept the Health Certificate

What if the airline doesn’t accept a country-specific health certificate?

Although a country-specific health certificate may be required by the destination country, you may also need to complete an APHIS Form 7001 (438.8 KB) or other form required by the airline for the animal to board the airplane in the United States. These forms may be used to demonstrate vaccinations, treatments, and health examinations in the timeframe required by the airline.

Note: *If you issue two health certificates for the animal, USDA can only endorse the health certificate required by the destination country. Don't submit the APHIS Form 7001 or other form required per an airline to USDA if it's not required by the destination country.*

What if the airline doesn't accept a digitally endorsed health certificate?

If the airline doesn't recognize the digital signature and seal on the electronically issued health certificate as official, provide this letter to the airline to resolve any concerns (239.52 KB).

Related Resources

- Live Animal Exports (non-pets)
- Travel With a Pet
- Frequently Asked Questions About Pet Travel for Accredited Veterinarians
- VEHCS Help
- Access VEHCS
- APHIS Endorsement Offices by State
- Find a USDA-Accredited Veterinarian

Important Reminder for Pet Dog Certificates

Check whether the dog will be returning to the United States and verify **all** import requirements. There may be requirements that need to be met before leaving the United States in order to return.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is the primary authority for dog imports. For requirements, visit the CDC website.

CDC requires all U.S.-vaccinated dogs that have traveled to a high-risk country for rabies within the past 6 months to have a "Certification of U.S.-Issued Rabies Vaccination" form. This form must be submitted by a USDA-accredited veterinarian and endorsed **before** the dog leaves the United States.

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