Frequently Asked Questions: Regulated Live Animal Imports

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This page answers common questions about importing animals into the United States that are regulated by APHIS Veterinary Services. These regulations help protect U.S. livestock from harmful diseases.

Animals entering the United States may be regulated by multiple Federal and State agencies. Importers and pet owners are responsible for meeting **all** applicable requirements.

Regulations

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Which animals does APHIS Veterinary Services regulate on import?

APHIS Veterinary Services regulates importation of the following live animals:

- Livestock (birds/poultry, horses and other equines, ruminants, swine) and associated germplasm
- Certain fish or aquatic species and associated germplasm
- Pachyderms (elephants, hippos, rhinoceroses, and tapirs)
- Hedgehogs and tenrecs
- Dogs from certain countries and dogs used in livestock handling
- Certain prohibited tortoise species
- Zoological ruminants to approved U.S. zoos

We do **not** regulate the import of cats, rabbits, rodents, amphibians, ferrets, primates, most reptiles, or aquatic mammals such as dolphins and sea lions.

Importation of these animals may be regulated by other agencies. For more information about APHIS Veterinary Services import requirements, visit Bringing Live Animals and Germplasm into the United States.

Does APHIS Veterinary Services regulate pets or companion animals on import?

APHIS Veterinary Services regulations are designed to prevent the introduction of livestock diseases. As a result, we regulate the importation of animals you may consider to be pets or companion animals, including:

- Livestock such as ruminants (cattle, sheep, goats, camelids, cervids); equids (horses, donkeys, mules); poultry and other birds; and pigs
- Certain prohibited tortoises
- Hedgehogs and tenrecs
- Koi
- Goldfish
- Dogs
- Other species (e.g., elephants, hippos, rhinoceroses, tapirs, zoological ruminants)

We do **not** regulate the import of other reptiles, cats, rabbits, rodents, amphibians, or ferrets.

For more information on APHIS Veterinary Services import requirements for pets, visit Bring a Pet From Another Country into the United States (Import).

Do other agencies regulate live animal imports?

Yes. Federal and State agencies and offices other than APHIS Veterinary Services regulate live animals on import. Your animal may be regulated by more than one agency. **As the importer, you are responsible for ensuring that all Federal and State import requirements are met.**

Other Federal agencies and offices that regulate live animals on import into the United States include:

- APHIS Animal Care (dogs for commercial sale or adoption, zoo animals)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (dogs, cats, turtles, primates, African rodents, etc.)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (endangered species)
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (marine mammals for public display)
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection (pets and wildlife)

The destination U.S. State may also have import requirements:

- National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
- State or Territorial veterinarian's office

Also, **contact your selected carrier** (e.g., airline) for any additional documentation the carrier may require.

Process

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What do I need to do to import my animal?

APHIS Veterinary Services Import Requirements

Import preparations and requirements vary depending on the species and animal health status of the exporting country. They may also change based on other countries the animal has been in before exporting, any countries transited enroute to the United States, and mode of transportation or carrier (airplane, ship, truck).

With few exceptions, before export you must:

- Apply for and receive an APHIS import permit.
- Arrange for a completed and endorsed veterinary health certificate.
- Submit VS Form 17-29: Declaration of Importation (106.94 KB) to the APHIS Port Office at the U.S. port of entry.
- Schedule an appointment with the APHIS Port Office to inspect the animal at the U.S. port of entry (not required for dogs).
- Arrange for import quarantine (if applicable).

Not all animals are eligible for import. See which animals APHIS Veterinary Services regulates on import. For species-specific information on these animals, visit Bringing Live Animals and Germplasm into the United States.

Federal and State agencies other than APHIS Veterinary Services regulate live animals on import. Your animal may be regulated by more than one agency. **As the importer, you are responsible for ensuring that all Federal and State import requirements are met.**

Other Federal and State Import Requirements

See "Do other agencies regulate live animal imports?" above.

Should I contact a broker to import my animal into the United States?

Some importers elect to use services provided by a broker. Their services may simplify the import process but are not required by APHIS Veterinary Services as a

condition of import.

For more information, visit Using a Broker To Import Horses into the United States and Find a Broker by Port.

How long does the process take before I can import my animal?

Get started as soon as possible! The process could take a few weeks to many months, depending on both the U.S. import requirements and the processes and procedures of the exporting country. Some animals must undergo a pre-export isolation or quarantine period, lasting from weeks to months, before the animal can present for entry into the United States. Start learning the requirements as soon as you can.

Also, the exporter should inform their veterinarian in the exporting country of the plan to export animals to the United States as early as possible. Their involvement is critical to the process.

What if I can’t fulfill the testing, treatment, or health status requirements for import?

If the animal that you wish to import is regulated by APHIS Veterinary Services and does not meet the requirements in the veterinary health certificate and/or the import permit, it is not eligible for import into the United States. If a noncompliant animal or germplasm arrives at a U.S. port of entry, APHIS Veterinary Services will refuse entry. This could result in financial obligations or loss of ownership. The animal may also be refused entry if it does not meet the requirements of other Federal or State agencies.

My shipment got held at the port of entry. What should I do?

Please contact the APHIS Port Office managing the U.S. port of entry listed on your import permit.

Permit

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Do I need an import permit from APHIS Veterinary Services?

With few exceptions, such as pet dogs and certain animals from Canada and Mexico, all live animals and their germplasm regulated by APHIS Veterinary Services must have an import permit to be eligible for entry into the United States.

How do I apply for an import permit?

You can apply for an import permit online using APHIS eFile. This will help expedite the entire permitting process and allow you to track the status of your permit(s), confirm receipt, and easily renew or amend existing permit(s). You can also apply for a permit by completing VS Form 17-129 Application for Import or In-Transit Permit (211.74 KB) and submitting it by email as described at Animal Health Permits.

Please allow **at least 7 business days** for APHIS Veterinary Services to process the import permit application.

How do I pay for my import permit?

Payment occurs as part of the online permitting process when you apply using APHIS eFile. If you are having issues with your import permit payment, contact laipermits@usda.gov or call 301-851-3300, option 2.

Note: Anyone can pay for the permit application. If you manually submit your application by email without payment information, our office will email you a payment letter requesting more information.

Who should I contact to follow up on my permit application?

Please contact laipermits@usda.gov or call 301-851-3300, option 2. Email is preferred. If you submitted the application online, you can log in to APHIS eFile and view the application status in “My Activity.”

How do I request changes to my permit after it is issued?

Limited changes (amendments) to the import permit may be made upon request. The following **cannot be amended,** and a new permit must be requested:

- Change in the U.S. port of entry
- Change in the quarantine location (if applicable)
- Change in the route of travel to include countries of lesser animal health status

For changes to other aspects of the permit, follow the steps below to request a permit amendment:

1. Go to APHIS eFile.
2. Log in to eFile using your eAuthentication credentials.
3. Select the “My Activity” tab, and update the “Display Recent” dropdown to “View All.”
4. Use the search bar or filters to find the permit you want to amend.
5. Select the “More Actions” dropdown and choose “Amend Permit.”

Note: If you submitted the permit application by email rather than using eFile, please email laipermits@usda.gov with your permit number and amendment request.

Permit amendments must be requested and completed before permit expiration ("void after" date). Please allow at least **3 business days** for APHIS to process permit amendments.

An amendment is not required if the flight information changes or there is a delayed date of arrival (still within the validity of the import permit) and all remaining information remains the same. Submit the updated flight information and date of arrival to the APHIS Port Office as soon as possible to ensure adequate coverage will be available. If coverage is not available, we may request that you select a different arrival date.

What should I do if my animal cannot travel within the validity period of the permit?

The expiration date ("void after") is listed on the import permit. Animals may not import on an expired permit. If you know your animal will travel after the validity period shown on your import permit, contact laipermits@usda.gov or call 301-851-3300, option 2, to request a permit amendment. You must submit the amendment request **at least 3 business days** before the original permit expires to allow time for processing. See above in "How do I request changes to my permit after it is issued?" for instructions on how to amend a permit. If a permit has expired before import, you must obtain a new permit.

How do I withdraw (cancel) my import permit application?

To withdraw a permit application submitted via APHIS eFile, follow the steps below:

1. Navigate to your "My Activity" page.
2. Select the "View Details" associated with the application you would like to withdraw.
3. On the "Application Details" page, select "Withdraw Application."
4. In the pop-up window, select the "Reason for Withdrawal" dropdown and choose your reason for withdrawing.
5. When you are done, select "Submit."

Once you submit, your withdrawal will be pending APHIS Veterinary Services approval. Once we approve your request, your application will be withdrawn.

To withdraw a permit application submitted by email, send an email to laipermits@usda.gov and include your cancellation request and application number.

Veterinary Health Certificate

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Do I need a veterinary health certificate?

With few exceptions, such as certain livestock from Canada imported for immediate slaughter, all animals regulated by APHIS Veterinary Services must be inspected by an authorized representative of the exporting country and certified to have met APHIS Veterinary Services import requirements. For more information on specific health certification requirements, including model health certificates, visit Bringing Live Animals and Germplasm into the United States.

All veterinary health certificates must be in English or with English translation (bilingual) and issued or endorsed by a full-time, salaried government official of the Competent Authority of the exporting country.

How do I obtain a health certificate?

Health certificates are issued by an authorized individual who inspects the animals in the exporting country before shipment to the United States. This may be an employee of the Competent Authority of the exporting country or a nongovernmental (private) veterinarian or other qualified official authorized by the Competent Authority to conduct official certification activities for export. If the latter, the health certificate must be endorsed (countersigned) by the Competent Authority.

Whoever is exporting the animals to the United States is responsible for arranging the inspection and certification. APHIS Veterinary Services does not certify animals

for export in foreign countries. Any questions regarding health certification should be directed to the exporter's veterinarian or the Competent Authority of the exporting country.

Who is the Competent Authority of the exporting country, and how do I contact them?

The Competent Authority of the exporting country is the governmental entity responsible for establishing and ensuring or overseeing implementation of national standards of animal and veterinary health, international veterinary certification, and approval or accreditation of certifying veterinarians. For additional support in identifying a foreign Competent Authority, visit:

- Members—World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH)
- U.S. Department of State—Contact Info for Foreign Embassies and Consulates

Is there an APHIS veterinarian in my country to fill out my export health certificate?

No. APHIS veterinarians stationed in countries other than the United States do not issue or endorse veterinary health certificates. The officials of Competent Authority of the exporting country must issue and endorse veterinary health certificates.

Port Inspection and Import Quarantine

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Why does APHIS need to inspect my animal, and what happens during inspection?

APHIS Veterinary Services inspects regulated animals presented for import into the United States to verify that our import requirements are met and to determine

whether the animal is eligible for import. The inspection must occur at the first U.S. port of entry (rare exceptions will be specified on the shipment-specific import permit). APHIS Port Services will inspect the animal, the veterinary health certificate, the APHIS import permit, and any other documentation specified in the import permit. In some instances, such as pet dogs, importation is regulated by several Federal agencies and import inspection may be performed by an agency other than APHIS.

How do I arrange for APHIS inspection at the U.S. port of entry?

Contact the APHIS Port Office managing the port of entry listed on your import permit **at least 3 business days** before your planned arrival date to request services. They will provide you with a Port Services Request form and work with you to schedule inspection of your shipment. The APHIS Port Office can also answer any questions you have about the port inspection process. For contact information, visit Port Services (by State).

If the flight information changes or arrival is delayed (still within the validity of the import permit), contact the APHIS Port Office as soon as possible to ensure adequate coverage will be available. If coverage is not available, they may ask you to revise the shipment date.

Does my animal need to go to import quarantine?

Except for certain animals from Canada and Mexico, APHIS Veterinary Services requires most livestock and farm animals, including horses, to undergo import quarantine. Visit Bringing Live Animals and Germplasm into the United States and select your type of animal to find out more about import quarantine requirements.

Why does APHIS quarantine my animal, and what happens during quarantine?

APHIS requires import quarantine so we can observe the importing animal for clinical signs of foreign animal disease. In some instances, the animals must be tested during quarantine to determine if they are free of diseases of concern.

Who should I contact to arrange import quarantine?

The APHIS Port Office managing the port of entry listed on your import permit can advise on the quarantine requirements for your shipment. They can also assist you with booking space at an APHIS Animal Import Center associated with your port of entry. To book space at a privately owned and operated import quarantine facility associated with your port of entry, you will need to contact the quarantine facility directly.

For information on Federal facilities, visit Animal Import Centers.

How much do port inspection and import quarantine cost?

APHIS is required by law to charge user fees for all services performed during the import process, including inspection at the U.S. port of entry. The importer of record (import permit holder) is responsible for all fees incurred for an import, including required testing and quarantine.

The cost of quarantine depends on the length of stay. The cost of diagnostic testing, if required, is separate from the quarantine fee. You can find user fee rates on the APHIS website at Veterinary Services Import/Export User Fees, or contact the APHIS Port Office managing the port of entry listed on your import permit for an estimate.

Need Help?

Live Animal Import Permit Team

Contact APHIS' Live Animal Import Permit team if you have questions before you apply for a permit.

For questions about import permits or permit applications:

Live Animal Import Permit Team

Email: laipermits@usda.gov

Phone: 301-851-3300

APHIS Port Services

For questions about import inspections at a port of entry, quarantine of animals arriving from a foreign country, or requesting approval as a private animal import quarantine facility, contact APHIS Port Services.

- Select a State - ▼

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Live Animal Import and Export

Contact APHIS' Live Animal Import and Export team for questions about current trade restrictions, or other questions not related to permits.

For general questions related to the import of a live animal:

Live Animal Import and Export

Email: laie@usda.gov

Phone: 301-851-3300

All Contacts

Definition of "Germplasm"

APHIS defines germplasm as gametes (including semen and oocytes), embryos, cloning tissue, and fertilized eggs.

Prohibited Tortoise Species

- Leopard tortoise (*Stigmochelys (Geochelone) pardalis*)
- African spurred tortoise (*Centrochelys (Geochelone) sulcata*)
- Bell's hingeback tortoise (*Kinixys belliana*)

Exceptions

For details on exceptions, visit the species-specific import pages at Bringing Live Animals and Germplasm into the United States.

Definition of "Exporter"

The individual, broker, or other entity responsible for ensuring certification of the health of the exported animals per APHIS requirements.

Definition of "Competent Authority"

Governmental authority responsible for establishing and ensuring or overseeing implementation of national standards of animal and veterinary health, international veterinary certification, and approval or accreditation of certifying veterinarians.

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