



PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Angela Piercy

Direct line: (345) 914-1766

Tel: (345) 949-8092

Fax: (345) 949-5936, 946-0641

E-mail address: angela.piercy@gov.ky

Importing Cats and Dogs

Revised conditions regarding the importation of dogs and cats into the Cayman Islands will help protect the local pet population from rabies and disease-carrying tapeworms and ticks, while making it easier for local residents to travel with their dogs and cats, reminds the Department of Agriculture.

Persons who plan to import dogs or cats are advised to obtain a copy of *Conditions Governing the Importation of Dogs and Cats into the Cayman Islands*. Local residents who expect to travel with their animals should refer to Annex 1 to the *Conditions: Guidelines for Travelling with Local Pets and Pets Resident in the Cayman Islands for at Least Six Months*. Both are available on the government website, www.gov.ky, or at the Department of Agriculture (DoA) in Lower Valley.

The Cayman Islands currently enjoys international rabies-free recognition, says Veterinary Officer Dr. Mark Trotman. He notes that local conditions and guidelines, in place since 31 March 2002, are more in keeping with the Office of International Epizootics (OIE) World Animal Health standards, as are found in other rabies-free territories such as the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii. "The department is asking everyone – visitors, residents and local veterinary clinics – to co-operate in keeping rabies out of the Cayman Islands," he explains.

Rabies is considered a major threat and is therefore a notifiable disease in Cayman; veterinary authorities are constantly on the lookout for its occurrence. By law, any suspect cases must be reported to the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Public Health. An infectious viral disease of the nervous system, rabies is transmitted by the saliva of infected animals – often through dog bites – and affects both animals and humans. It is characterised by excessive salivation; aversion to water; painful spasms while attempting to swallow; convulsions; behavioural changes such as uncharacteristic aggressiveness; paralysis and eventually death. Once symptoms appear, there is no cure and affected animals and people invariably die.

Additionally, the new conditions require specific treatment for ticks and tapeworms in order to keep Cayman free of certain diseases that may be transmitted by common parasites of dogs and cats. For example, Lyme disease, a bacterial disease of both dogs and humans, is transmitted by ticks that commonly occur on dogs in North America. Heartwater, an economically devastating disease of cattle, may be transmitted by ticks occurring on pets in other Caribbean territories and throughout the world. Some species of dog tapeworms cause a disease known as Hydatid disease in humans.

Cayman's previous guidelines managed to keep the Islands from experiencing a rabies outbreak, Dr. Trotman acknowledges. "However, the increase in movement of animals into and out of the Islands, by transient residents as well as tourists – and also considering the growing trade in pets from North America and other territories where rabies is endemic – puts the Islands' animal and human population at much greater risk." The new conditions are intended to further mitigate that risk.

He provided an overview of the new conditions and guidelines; however, persons are still encouraged to obtain the full documents.

For persons who wish to import dogs and cats, the animal:

1. must first be permanently identified with a microchip or tattoo.
2. A licensed veterinarian must then vaccinate the pet against rabies.
3. A blood test must be taken after vaccination to ensure that the vaccine was effective.
4. The pet is eligible for entry into the Cayman Islands six months after the date that the blood was drawn, once the test result indicates that the vaccine was effective.
5. Within 14 days of the scheduled date of travel, the pet must be treated for tapeworms and ticks, examined by a veterinarian and receive an international export health certificate issued by the government of the country of origin.

The six-month waiting period can be waived in specific cases, Dr. Trotman notes. The conditions also require pet owners to obtain an import permit, and they specify that certain breeds are prohibited from entry into the Cayman Islands.

For local persons who wish to travel with their pets, the guidelines include:

1. permanently identifying the animal with a microchip or tattoo.
2. A licensed veterinarian must then vaccinate the pet against rabies.
3. A blood test must be taken after vaccination to ensure that the vaccine was effective.
4. Once the blood test result is received, and indicates that the vaccine was effective, the owner is eligible to apply for an Animal Passport.

5. Within 14 days of the scheduled date of travel, the pet must be treated for tapeworms and ticks, examined by a veterinarian and receive an export health certificate issued by the DoA.
6. Upon returning, if the overseas stay is 14 days or fewer, present the passport and health certificate to the agricultural inspector at the port of entry.
7. If the stay was longer than 14 days, you must obtain an official veterinary health certificate from the country that was visited, however no import permit is needed.

There are also transportation and inspection instructions, which are detailed on the forms, Dr. Trotman says.

He emphasises that all animals and documents are subject to examination at the port of entry by an approved inspector. Dogs and cats that do not meet requirements will be refused entry and exported immediately at the owners' expense, or destroyed, at the discretion of the Chief Agricultural and Veterinary Officer

Dr. Trotman underscores that the new guidelines and conditions are virtually parallel to those of the UK Pet Travel Scheme, which was extended to Cayman on 1 March 2001. "Accordingly, many pet owners have already undertaken steps that dovetail with our revised measures," he says. Persons are again reminded to familiarise themselves with local guidelines and conditions by visiting www.gov.ky or the Department of Agriculture in Lower Valley, and obtaining the relevant documents.

(GIS)