

AKVMA Signs On To Healthy Dog Importation Act H.R. 6921

AKVMA has signed onto the support of this legislation for improved dog importation standards to prevent the introduction and spread of diseases impacting animal and human health. The legislation promotes a collaborative inspection process where the USDA, CDC and CBP work together to ensure imported dogs are healthy and will not pose a threat to our country. The bill has been referred to the House Committee on Agriculture.

KEY POINTS:

- **U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that up to 1.245 million dogs are imported into the U.S. each year**
- **As the number of imported dogs increases, so does the risk of importing nonnative parasites and zoonotic diseases**
- **In the past five years, dogs have been imported with rabies, canine influenza, Asian canine distemper, leptospirosis, screwworm, and canine melioidosis**
- **Current pet import oversight mechanisms established prior to the exponential growth of imports are unable to protect against this public and animal health threat**

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

CDC estimates that up to 1.245 million dogs are imported into the U.S. each year, most of these are personal pets. For the estimated 113,000 imported from countries that are at a high-risk for rabies transmission, CDC requires a rabies vaccination certificate, but no other health documentation or identification. For the 950,000 imported from rabies-free or low-risk countries, CDC requires no documentation or vaccination. A visual inspection provided by Customs and Border Protection personnel at the first port of entry is the only screening required by these dogs.

USDA-APHIS has separate regulatory authority over dogs imported for resale, which is defined as “dogs imported for sale in wholesale channels, at retail, and for adoption after arrival in the United States”. USDA’s import requirements are more stringent than CDC’s, unfortunately they apply to only half of a percent of all imported dogs.

WHAT THIS BILL WILL DO?

This legislation provides the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) with additional tools to monitor and safeguard the health of dogs being imported into the U.S. to ensure that all dogs entering the country are healthy and not at risk to spread dangerous diseases that could adversely impact animal and public health.

Specifically:

- The Secretary of Agriculture is provided authority to determine which vaccinations and other health information is required for entry of dogs into the U.S. This authority will be carried out by USDA’s Veterinary Services (VS) division.
- Every dog entering the U.S. must be accompanied by a certificate of veterinary inspection (health certificate), issued by a licensed veterinarian accredited by a competent veterinary authority recognized by the Secretary. The health certificate must certify that the dog has received all required vaccinations and demonstrated negative test results.
- Health certificates must be submitted to USDA, which will maintain a centralized, publicly available database. Required documentation may be submitted electronically. All submitted information will be made available to the secretaries of Health and Human Services (CDC), Commerce, and Homeland Security (CBP) to promote inter-agency coordination and facilitate verification upon arrival in the U.S.
- All dogs imported must be permanently identified.
- The Secretary of Agriculture may set fees for the issuance of importation permits to offset costs for increased monitoring and oversight.

AVMA supports robust inspection of dogs imported into the U.S. With only a small percentage of dogs inspected, there is an increased risk of these animals bringing diseases into the country that could impact animal and human health.