REDUCING RISKS FROM SICK IMPORTED RESCUE PETS

As a grooming professional, you work hard to protect the health and safety of pets and to keep your facility sanitary. Despite your best efforts to provide the highest level of care, an emerging threat to pet health puts dogs in public spaces at heightened risk of disease transmission.

In recent years, a new type of canine influenza, a variant of canine rabies previously eradicated in the United States, and a deadly strain of canine distemper virus not previously found in North America have all been diagnosed here. In each case, dogs imported for rescue were the sources of these diseases.

Dogs imported for American rescue markets tend to be higher risk because, by definition, they come from unknown sources including street/feral dogs, overseas puppy mills that lack health and welfare regulations required of U.S. breeders, strays, and other sources where disease can be rampant.

The spread of diseases via imported rescue pets puts you, your staff, your clients and their dogs in danger. From a business perspective, when an outbreak of a new or virulent pet disease occurs, owners avoid going to heavily-populated pet areas such as dog parks, boarding kennels, dog shows, pet events—and groomers.

Ethical U.S. shelters and rescue groups provide a valuable service. However, careless, profit-driven or unscrupulous rescue pet importers take advantage of Americans’ empathy and love for dogs and the good reputation of responsible rescues. As a result, the U.S. has become a dumping ground for randomly-sourced foreign “rescue” dogs. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated one million dogs arrive in the U.S. each year from Turkey, Greece, several Middle Eastern countries, China, Korea and other foreign sources.

Governmental oversight of imported companion animals is minimal at best. When procedures are not followed, dogs carrying serious diseases have been brought into the U.S. The next dog through the door of your grooming business could be fresh off an international flight. What do you know about its health?

PROBLEMS WITH MINIMALLY-REGULATED IMPORTED RESCUE PETS

The first U.S. cases of H3N2 canine influenza were traced to a shipment of imported rescue dogs that arrived in Chicago in 2015. The disease spread throughout the U.S., and some dogs died until a vaccine was developed. New cases continue to be transmitted among unvaccinated dogs. This disease has also been found in cats.

A rescue dog with rabies was imported from Cairo in 2017. It was the second case of an imported rabid rescue dog from Egypt in three years. In 2018, a rescue dog from Korea was found to be infected with the Asia-1 strain of canine distemper virus (CDV), a disease previously unknown in North America. The Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine reported, “The United States receives rescued companion animals from all over the world, and any of these animals could be carrying viruses,
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bacteria, and parasites not commonly seen in North America.”

Additional disorders including canis brucellosis, screwworm, and other parasites and infections have been found to be directly related to irresponsibly imported animals. Some are zoonotic—diseases that normally exist in animals but that can also infect humans.

**TAKING ACTION TO KEEP DOGS SAFE**

Prevention of infection is much easier than managing the consequences. According to the AKC S.A.F.E. Certified Groomer/Salon Oath, “Equipment and surfaces that come in contact with the pet must be cleaned prior to reuse.” This is a good standard of practice that helps minimize the risk of disease transmission.

Other safety procedures might include requiring proof of vaccination/titer status for dogs before they enter your facility. Vaccination protocols continue to be updated, so be sure to keep up with current recommendations. For new customers, consider establishing a minimum timeline between the administration of vaccinations and the first grooming appointment so that immunities have time to become established.

It’s also important for your grooming business to have a decontamination plan in the unfortunate event that a sick dog comes into your salon, regardless of how or where the dog acquired the illness.

AKC Government Relations (GR) advocates for increased health requirements for dogs imported to the U.S. AKC GR, key federations and the National Animal Interest Alliance played a major role in amending the 2018 federal Farm Bill to include language that strengthens actions among several federal departments to collect, compile and report data to Congress on the health implications.
of dog importation. AKC and NAIA continue to work together in 2019 to further expand import requirements that protect against the importing of disease into the U.S.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, health certificates for dogs entering the U.S. are often invalid or forged. AKC GR supports expanded governmental efforts to ensure the validity of veterinary health documentation for all imported dogs.

In addition to AKC’s educational, legislative and regulatory initiatives to advance canine well-being, the AKC Canine Health Foundation works to improve the health of all dogs by funding scientific research and supporting the dissemination of health information on preventing, treating and curing canine disease. While research to find cures is important, minimizing the risk of international disease transmission among imported pets is a critical and immediate need.

YOUR VOICE COUNTS IN WASHINGTON DC

With an estimated 80 million owned dogs in the U.S., the importation of rescue dogs with diseases that affect animal and human health should be a significant concern. It seems like such a simple solution: just stop sick pets at the point of entry. But that takes resources, and for resources to be allocated, lawmakers must know that a problem exists. They need to understand how irresponsible rescue pet importation affects U.S. dogs, pet owners and pet industry professionals.

Your voice counts! Please send messages to your representatives in Congress urging federal action to strengthen the oversight and regulation of imported rescue pets. Encourage the enactment of measures to ensure that imported dogs are fully immunized and free from infection, parasites and contagious diseases. Ask your governmental officials to require that no dog may be imported without an individual veterinary examination; a valid health certificate; and documentation regarding the source of the dog, the party responsible for it upon arrival, and if the dog will be offered for adoption or sale within the next six months.

To learn who your representatives in Congress and in your state are, visit the AKC Legislative Action Center toolbox (www.akcgr.org). While you are there, view the many resources you can use in your advocacy efforts.

As always, the AKC GR team is available to help. Contact 919-816-3720 or doglaw@akc.org for information and assistance. >

References:

4. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6750a3.htm

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