

Municipal Dog Licensing Guidance

January 2019

Summary

Owners of dogs 7 months of age or older are required by State statute to license their dogs in the municipality where the dogs are housed. Licenses can be issued with either a 1 or 3-year duration and licenses shall expire no later in the year than June 30th.

Many municipalities also require rabies vaccination and licensure of cats through municipal ordinances.

Benefits of Dog Licensure

Licensing dogs and placing the registration tag on the dog's collar has many benefits for the dog owner, and the community:

- Licensed dogs are vaccinated against rabies (with some exceptions explained below) and those with current license tags on their collars are considered protected from the rabies virus
- A licensed dog that wanders off the owner's property or gets lost can be traced and returned to its owner by animal control officers
- When persons are bitten by a licensed dog, the owner is usually found, and the dog is placed under a 10 day confinement and observation that will prevent the bite victim from needing to begin rabies post-exposure prophylaxis
- Dog licensing is mandatory in all New Jersey municipalities and the licensing fee is much less than the fines and penalties for having unlicensed dogs
- License fees support animal control, animal sheltering and rabies control activities within the municipality
- Dog licensing fees help fund the free State-sponsored municipal rabies vaccination clinics, the State operated low cost spay and neuter program and testing of suspect rabid wildlife

Processing Dog Licensing Revenue

Dog licensing revenue is required to be placed in a special municipal account separate from any other accounts and shall be used for the following purposes only: capturing and impounding stray dogs and cats, prevention and control of rabies, providing rabies post exposure prophylaxis, and administration of the provisions of N.J.S.A. 4:19-15.1 et. seq.

Municipal dog licensing clerks are required to annually collect the following fees from the owner of each dog in the municipality:

- \$1.00 Registration fee
- \$0.20 Pilot clinic fee
- \$3.00 Animal population control (APC) fee, for dogs not spayed or neutered

Dog licensing clerks shall forward these collected fees to the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) every month, either through electronic payment or by sending a check, with a fully completed VPH-10 form accompanying all payments. Guidance on submission of monthly dog licensing fees is posted on the Department's website: <http://www.state.nj.us/health/vph/dog-licensing/>

The \$1.00 Registration fees collected by municipalities are forwarded to the NJDOH and placed into a special account to be used for administration of N.J.S.A. 4:19-15.1 et. seq. and the prevention and control of rabies throughout the State. The \$3.00 and \$0.20 fees are placed into an account to fund the activities of the APC Low Cost Spay and Neuter Program.

Information regarding the APC program is posted on the NJDOH website:

<http://www.state.nj.us/health/vph/pop-control/>

Three Year Dog Licenses

Municipal governments can offer their residents the option of issuing dog licenses that expire in three years. Three-year licenses cannot be more expensive than three times the sum charged for an annual dog license. The Registration, Pilot clinic and Animal population control fees shall all be tripled for each 3-year dog license issued in the municipality. This revenue shall be sent to the NJDOH monthly. The fees for all 3-year dog licenses are:

- \$3.00 Registration fee
- \$0.60 Pilot clinic fee
- \$9.00 Animal population control (APC) fee for dogs not spayed or neuter

Requirements for Dog Licensure

Although many municipal governments require licensure during one designated month, licenses can be issued throughout the first 6 calendar months (January - June). Offering this flexibility to dog-owning residents allows them to better coordinate their dog's rabies vaccination duration with the licensure period of the municipality.

For a dog license to be issued, the dog owner must show to their municipal licensing authority proof that a licensed veterinarian administered a rabies vaccine to the dog, such as a rabies vaccination certificate. New Jersey regulations require that the duration of immunity from the most recent vaccination extends through at least the first 10 months of the 12-month licensing period. Animals that have a duration of immunity which expires prior to the 10-month cut-off must receive a booster rabies vaccination prior to licensure. (N.J.A.C. 8:23A-4.1)

Rabies vaccines have a very low rate of adverse reactions compared to other vaccines. Revaccinating an animal before expiration of the previous vaccine has not been associated with an increased occurrence of adverse reactions and is not medically contraindicated. Veterinarians can choose to use rabies vaccines with either a 1 or 3-year duration of immunity.

Rabies Vaccination Requirement for Licensure

The NJDOH recommends revaccination of dogs and cats prior to expiration of the previous vaccination. Some animals may need to be revaccinated before the duration of immunity expires to qualify for licensure. Administering a rabies vaccine before the duration of immunity of a previous vaccination has expired is not associated with an increased occurrence of adverse reactions in dogs. A guidance document addressing this topic is posted on the NJDOH website:

http://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/izdp/documents/duration_rabies_vaccine.pdf

Exemption of Vaccination by Veterinarians

Municipal dog licensing officials shall grant an exemption to the rabies inoculation requirement for any dog that a licensed veterinarian certifies in writing to be incapable of being inoculated because of an infirmity, other physical condition, or regimen of therapy (N.J.A.C. 8:23A-4.3). The NJDOH recommends revaccination of dogs and cats prior to expiration of the previous vaccination to ensure an overlap of immunity. Revaccinating animals prior to the expiration of the duration of immunity has not been associated with an increased occurrence of adverse reactions and is not a valid reason to exempt a dog from vaccination.

The VPH-28 form shall be used by veterinarians to exempt a dog from rabies vaccination because of an infirmity, other physical condition, or regimen of therapy. This form is posted on the NJDOH website:

<http://nj.gov/health/forms/vph-28.pdf>

Dogs Exempt from Licensure

Dogs housed in licensed animal facilities, i.e., kennels pet shops, pounds and shelters, are exempt from licensure until such time that they are sold, adopted, or transferred into foster homes or rescue group facilities.

Repeal of the Requirement to Perform an Annual Municipal Canvass of Licensed Dogs

The statutory requirement for municipal governments to perform a canvass of all owned dogs in their jurisdiction (N.J.S.A. 4:19-15.15) has been repealed. However, the NJDOH recommends that a canvass be conducted if possible to increase the number of dogs licensed and licensing revenue into the municipal budget.

Estimating the Number of Dogs and Cats per Capita

The NJDOH recommends that Health Officers and municipal dog licensing clerks estimate the number of dogs and cats housed in their communities to gauge how effective their licensing efforts are. Based on data published by the American Veterinary Medical Association, there are approximately 5.2 million owned dogs and 5.7 million owned cats in the State. To estimate the number of dogs in a population per capita, multiply the population by .156. To estimate the number of owned (not feral) cats, multiply the population by .169.

Viewing the Licensing Statutes and Regulations

State statutes can be viewed on the New Jersey Legislature website: <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/>. Select "Statutes" from the left menu on the home page under the heading "Laws and Constitution." Then search for specific statutes in the search box on the top of the page, e.g., "4:19-15.2." The statutes addressing municipal dog licensing are N.J.S.A. 4:19-15.1 through 15.7 and 15.18 through 15.23.

State regulations can also be viewed on-line by following the instructions on the NJDOH website: <http://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/reporting.shtml>. The regulations governing municipal dog licensing are N.J.A.C. 8:23A-4.1 through 4.3

A resource to improve compliance with dog and cat licensure requirements was developed through a Sustainable Jersey initiative titled "A Municipal Approach to a Self-Sustaining Community Animal Welfare and Enhanced License Compliance Program" is available online:

<http://www.cditraining.org/Links/A.%20%20Enhanced%20License%20Compliance.pdf>

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Please contact the NJDOH Communicable Disease Service for assistance with dog licensing by calling 609-826-4872 or 5964.