



VETERINARY PRACTITIONERS BOARD
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Certification

The ACT Veterinary Practitioners Code of Professional Conduct states

A veterinary practitioner must not certify to any fact within his or her professional expertise or knowledge, or that a veterinary service has been provided, unless the veterinary practitioner has personal knowledge of the fact or has personally provided, or supervised the provision of, the veterinary service concerned.

Any certification by a veterinary practitioner must contain such detail as is necessary to ensure that it is complete and accurate and that the meaning is clear.

The community places a great deal of trust in veterinary practitioners. Consequently, veterinary practitioners have been given the authority to sign a variety of documents on the assumption that they will only sign statements that they know, or reasonably believe, to be true. A high standard of veterinary certification is expected of the veterinary profession by the community and for the international reputation of Australia's veterinary services.

This applies to the formal issuing of veterinary certificates and to various declarations, statements and/or evidence provided by veterinary practitioners in the course of their professional duties (for example, witness statements and insurance claims).

A veterinary practitioner should only certify those matters that are within their knowledge and they can ascertain. Matters known to other persons such as the farmer, breeder, trainer or truck driver should be subject to declaration by those persons not by the veterinary practitioner.

Before signing a certificate, a veterinary practitioner needs to consider the following:

- Certificates must be prepared with honesty, care and accuracy, using terms that are simple and easy to understand and without words or phrases, which are capable of more than one interpretation. It must be legible, preferably type-written, computer generated or produced using a pre-printed form. It should bear the date that the examination or procedure was carried out, the date of issue of the certificate and the name, qualifications, unique registration number (for example, ACT31) and address of the issuing, veterinary practitioner. A copy should be made and kept in a paper or computer file.
- Veterinary practitioners should not sign certificates where there is a conflict of interest. Examples of such conflict includes the provision of certification for the veterinary practitioner's own or family animals or a pre-purchase examination where the veterinary practitioner has an undisclosed practitioner-client relationship with the vendor.
- The certificate should clearly and accurately identify the animal (or animals) that is the subject of the certificate.
- Where appropriate, the certificate may indicate a time period for which the certificate will remain valid.

- The certificate should be completed and issued within a reasonable time period (maximum 14 days) from the time of examination of the animal. A longer delay may be reasonable if comprehensive and contemporaneous records are available. The certificate should specify the date of any examination, test or procedure on which the certificate relies.
- Certificates should be issued and presented in the original. Where a duplicate certificate is made for any valid reason, it must be clearly identified as a duplicate before issue. A vaccination certificate is an original while a vaccination record is a duplicate certificate.

Providing inaccurate, misleading, false or fraudulent certification can have very serious consequences for veterinary practitioners such as:

- a finding of professional misconduct under the *Veterinary Practice Act 2018*
- criminal proceedings for fraudulent activities
- penalties or sanctions for negligence under common law
- liability for consequences (for example, disease spread) under trade practices legislation.

If a veterinary practitioner using **proforma certificates** provided by the Australian Veterinary Association or other accreditation body for specific certification purposes, such as insurance or pre-purchase examinations, it is recommended that they are completed in full. Any sections not applicable should be neatly ruled off to minimise the opportunity for details to be added by a third party after issue.

If a veterinary practitioner is requested to provide a certificate with respect to specific conditions where special knowledge or competence is essential for making an accurate assessment of conditions to be certified, only those veterinary practitioners who are appropriately trained and suitably competent to undertake clinical examinations in such circumstances should proceed with the view of providing certificates. Of particular note in this respect are certain skeletal, cardiac and ophthalmic conditions which have a genetic origin. Similarly, specific competence and appropriate training is required before certifying equines for soundness and bulls for fertility.

Checklist for vaccination certificates for dogs and cats

When a veterinary practitioner provides a vaccination certificate (record) it should be prepared with care and accuracy. The veterinary practitioner must ensure the following information is included on the certificate and is legible:

- Date of vaccination
- Breed or type
- Sex of animal
- Known or approximate age or date of birth
- Colour

- Microchip number (if microchipped)
- The name of the owner at the time of the vaccination (this may be a breeder or pet shop)
- The name and address of the veterinary practitioner and veterinary practice
- The signature of the veterinary practitioner
- The unique registration number of the veterinary practitioner (for example, ACT31)
- Vaccine batch numbers - the use of the sticker from the vaccine vial is recommended

Veterinary practitioners must also ensure that all information on the vaccination certificate is included in the clinical record for the animal.

Veterinary certificates and pet shops and breeders

Giving incomplete and/or unsigned veterinary certificates to pet shops, breeders or practice clients is not acceptable.

While Schedule 4 vaccines (live vaccines) can only be administered or dispensed by registered veterinary practitioners, Schedule 5 products (inactivated or killed vaccines) however can be purchased and administered by owners, pet shops and breeders. Blank vaccination cards with the veterinary practitioner's contact details pre-recorded on them, could be used to mislead and to imply that a veterinary practitioner has examined and vaccinated the animal when that is not the case.

Veterinary certificates, whether manually or computer generated, must be signed exclusively by registered veterinary practitioners.

Notice to animal owners about vaccination certificates

Vaccination certificates (or records) should not be relied on as certificates of health.