



VETERINARY PRACTITIONERS BOARD
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Biosecurity and infection control policy

Role of the Veterinary Practitioners Board

The main functions of the Veterinary Practitioners Board as outlined in the *Veterinary Practice Act 2018* (the Act) include:

- registering veterinary practitioners and premises;
- conducting investigations of veterinary practitioners;
- taking disciplinary action against veterinary practitioners;
- enforcing this Act, developing codes of professional conduct for veterinary practitioners; and
- setting standards for veterinary premises.

In the event of a biosecurity or infection control issue the Board can play an important role in information sharing and supporting the ACT and Federal Government in managing, for example, a disease outbreak. This could include things such as communicating with registered veterinarians or providing for emergency registration of overseas or retired veterinarians, subject to appropriate conditions, to assist with an outbreak in accordance with the Act.

The Veterinary Practitioners Board does not manage biosecurity or infection outbreaks in the ACT. This is a role for the ACT and Federal governments as outlined below.

Role of the Chief Veterinary Officer (ACT)

The government veterinarians, the Chief Veterinary Officer (ACT) and the Biosecurity Veterinary Officer, are a valuable resource for locally relevant, up to date, independent advice and information on biosecurity and animal health issues. They deliver animal health programs within the ACT including animal disease investigations, maintain an appropriate level of emergency preparedness, provide extension services to our rural landholders, improve traceability for livestock, assist in promoting good farm biosecurity practices directly with landholders and can provide advice on animal welfare issues.

The Chief Veterinary Officer has a key role under ACT Biosecurity legislation, being the *Animal Diseases Act 2005* and *Plant Diseases Act 2002*. These Acts provide mechanisms for the detection, prevention and control of outbreaks in the ACT, and allow the ACT to assist in the prevention and control of outbreaks of endemic and exotic animal and plant diseases in other jurisdictions within Australia. The ACT Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate is responsible for this legislation and more information can be found on their website.

Australian Government

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry administers Australian Government biosecurity legislation in order to protect Australia's animal, plant and human health status and to maintain market access for Australian food and other agricultural exports.

During pest and disease outbreaks, the department coordinates strategic response efforts across the whole-of-government and in collaboration with affected industries.

In addition to national arrangements, the Australian Government Biosecurity and Agricultural Response Plan (AUSBIOAGPLAN) provides a mechanism for Australian Government coordination in response to plant and animal biosecurity and agricultural incidents. More information can be found on their website.

POLICY 1: Biosecurity and infection control principles

Veterinary practitioners in the ACT must apply good infection prevention and control principles when practicing; they must assess biosecurity risks and take appropriate measures to minimise those risks. They must comply with jurisdictional requirements for reporting suspected or confirmed notifiable animal diseases.

Background information

Veterinary practitioners must practice good infection prevention and control principles to minimise the risk of inadvertently infecting themselves, others or their patients.

The Australian Veterinary Association's Guidelines for Veterinary Personal Biosecurity include information about infection prevention and control for veterinary practices of all types and offer approaches to: developing an infection prevention and control plan; farm visit biosecurity procedures; and dealing with high risk situations.

Appropriate biosecurity procedures must be routinely adopted for all property visits. For landowners who have an on-farm biosecurity plan in place, the veterinarian must adhere to this plan.

Veterinary practitioners can pose a particularly high risk for the spread of diseases of livestock via fomite transmission; they wear clothing and use equipment and instruments that come in close contact with animals and their bodily fluids; and they may visit several properties over a brief period of time.

Inadvertent spread of an emergency animal disease (e.g. foot and mouth disease) by veterinary practitioners could have dire consequences for the agricultural community, or for public health.

Appropriate biosecurity procedures must be routinely adopted for all property visits because the risk of contamination after contact with even apparently healthy animals cannot be discounted.

Veterinary practitioners should assess the biosecurity risks posed by their visits to properties and take appropriate measures to minimise those risks, taking into account: species attended; intensiveness of husbandry; livestock health and biosecurity status; handling, procedures and equipment in use; zoonotic disease risk; and any other relevant risk factors.

For provision of all on-site veterinary services to farms, stables or livestock premises, veterinary practitioners should routinely undertake appropriate hygiene and decontamination measures between visits to minimise disease transmission risk, including for each visit:

- wearing protective clothing and footwear that is clean and free of organic debris;
- avoiding unnecessary contact with livestock areas, pens, barns;
- washing hands before and after leaving the premises;
- thoroughly cleaning and appropriately decontaminating equipment and instruments between visits;
- avoiding driving the veterinary practitioner's vehicle into or through animal production areas or, if necessary to do so, ensuring that tyres and wheel wells are cleaned (free of organic

- debris) before leaving the property or visiting the next property; and
- ensuring the vehicle used for property visits is clean and hygienic at all times and is well stocked with sufficient equipment and disposable items to prevent spread of infectious diseases between patients and premises.

As well as complying with these minimum standards, veterinary practitioners should follow any additional specific biosecurity requirements imposed by owners or producers, e.g. curfew periods and showering on entry.

Where risk assessment indicates the possibility of a **zoonotic** disease, veterinary practitioners should take additional appropriate measures to minimise the risk of infection to themselves and other people. (See Policy 2 – Zoonotic diseases)

Where risk assessment indicates the possibility of a **notifiable endemic or exotic animal disease**, Veterinary practitioners should comply with relevant jurisdictional requirements for notification and handling the response (see Policy 3 - Notifiable endemic and exotic animal diseases)

POLICY 2: Zoonotic diseases

Veterinary practitioners must take appropriate measures to minimise risks of infecting themselves and other people with zoonotic diseases.

Background information

Zoonoses are diseases which can be transmitted to humans or other animals from animals. There are many disease agents that can cause disease in multiple species of animals including humans.

Where risk assessment indicates the possibility of a zoonotic disease, veterinary practitioners should take additional appropriate measures for minimising the risk of infection to themselves and the infection of other people.

See also, [Zoonotic Diseases \(NSW Department of Primary Industries\)](#)

POLICY 3: Notifiable endemic and exotic animal diseases

Veterinary practitioners in the ACT must be aware of and comply with requirements and procedures for dealing with suspected or confirmed notifiable diseases and emergency animal diseases.

Background information

Veterinary practitioners should maintain awareness of requirements and procedures for notifying government and for dealing with suspected or confirmed endemic and exotic animal diseases under the [Animal Diseases Act 2005](#). They should be familiar with the lists of diseases in the following two documents:

- the ACT [Animal Diseases \(Endemic Diseases\) Declaration 2021](#)
- the ACT [Animal Diseases \(Exotic Diseases\) Declaration 2018](#)

Veterinary practitioners have an important role in the early recognition of endemic and exotic animal diseases. Early recognition is one of the most important factors influencing the chance of controlling the disease and reducing its economic and social impact on the community.

If a veterinary practitioner has identified or suspects a notifiable endemic or exotic animal disease, they must notify the ACT Chief Veterinary Officer, or ring the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline which will direct you straight to your respective state or territory biosecurity authority.

- **Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline: 1800 675 888** (24 hours, 7 days a week)

Veterinary practitioners should also ensure that they isolate suspected animals appropriately and keep accurate and complete records including any diagnostic tests performed.

For rapid trace-back of suspected notifiable endemic or exotic diseases, it is crucial for laboratory submission forms to be completed fully and clearly.

Veterinary practitioners who treat animals under quarantine or quarantine surveillance should comply with all relevant jurisdictional requirements. In addition to showering, use of protective clothing and decontamination of equipment, this may include a period of avoidance of contact with livestock of the same species outside of the quarantine area.

Resources

- [National List of notifiable animal diseases](#)
- [State and territory notifiable animal diseases lists](#)
- [Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry website \(Australian Government\)](#)
- [Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Website \(ACT government\)](#)
- VETLEARN: [Veterinarians, hobby farmers and backyard livestock](#) (NSW Department of Primary Industries), a free 2-hour online course designed to improve engagement with hobby farmers and reduce peri-urban biosecurity risks.
- [Animal Health Australia: Animal Disease Alert](#)