

California Canine Rabies Vaccination Exemption Law

California Health and Safety Code Section 121690(b)(2)

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Existing law requires that a dog three months of age or older must be vaccinated against rabies (California Health and Safety Code section 121690 (b)). The rabies vaccination is a prerequisite to licensing, which is required under subdivision (a) of the same section. In 2012, the California legislature passed “Molly’s Law,” which was an amendment to the Health and Safety Code declaring that the vaccination requirement is exempted in a dog whose life would be endangered due to disease and other considerations that a veterinarian can verify and document as a result of receiving the rabies vaccine.

Local animal health authorities are vested with the jurisdictional authority to either grant or deny an exemption request.

The following is a summary of the requirements outlined in the law in order for a dog to be considered for exemption:

- A veterinarian must examine the dog on an annual basis to confirm that the dog should or should not receive the rabies vaccine.
- At the discretion of the local public health officer, exempt dogs shall be confined to the premises of the owner, keeper, or harbinger and when off the premises, shall be in the control of an adult by way of a leash no more than six feet long.
- This law also prohibits the license period for an unvaccinated dog from extending beyond one year, implying that owners will have to reapply for the exemption on an annual basis.
- Dogs that are granted a rabies vaccination exemption will be considered unvaccinated by health officials and thus, if they are involved in



a bite incident, the procedures followed for them will differ from those of a vaccinated dog.

- Any dog in violation of these legal requirements shall be impounded by the local animal health authority.

The law mandates that local health authorities create a rabies vaccine exemption request form that an owner must obtain and submit to authorities. The form must include a signed statement from a veterinarian explaining the inadvisability of the vaccination and a signed statement by the dog owner affirming that the owner understands the consequences and accepts all liability associated with owning an unvaccinated dog.

It is incumbent upon owners to obtain forms from the county and apply for exemption on an annual basis. Veterinarians are not required to perform this function on behalf of owners. The only obligations of the veterinarian are to examine the dog on an annual basis

to confirm that the dog should or should not receive the rabies vaccine and to then issue a signed statement explaining the inadvisability of the vaccination.

Note that submitting rabies antibody titers to local animal health authorities is insufficient for a vaccination exemption to be granted in accordance with the law. ■

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