

INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT OF PETS: INDIVIDUAL IDENTIFICATION, PET PASSPORTS, TRACEABILITY, QUARANTINE AND SANITARY CONTROLS

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Rabies is a notifiable disease in all Member States of the European Union ('EU'). EU-supported oral vaccination programmes have been implemented since the early 90s and have substantially reduced the incidence of the disease in wildlife, and consequently in domestic dogs and cats, and gradually eradicated the disease in large parts of the EU.

Although the incidence in humans is very low in Europe, fatal outcomes following dog bites in travellers returning from countries with urban rabies are still documented and sporadic reports of rabies cases in illegally introduced dogs continue to require vigilance.

In 2003, due to the improved situation with regard to rabies, the EU adopted a set of health rules (referred to as the 'Pet Regulation') which aim at facilitating the cross-border movement of pet animals while safeguarding animal and public health.

These rules provide that pet animals accompanying their owner and entering or re-entering a Member State from another Member State or certain listed third countries are to be identified with an electronic microchip or a tattoo applied before 3 July 2011 and be accompanied by a passport or an animal health certificate documenting a valid anti-rabies vaccination certified by an authorised veterinarian.

Entry from third countries with a higher risk of rabies is subject to complementary verification of a protective immunity by testing against the WHO threshold titre of 0.5 IU/ml for neutralising antibodies and a subsequent waiting period to allow the development of clinical signs in possibly incubating animals.

The Pet Regulation does not apply to national movement within a Member State. However, electronic identification of dogs and in some cases their registration may be mandatory in some Member States for purposes other than animal health and compulsory vaccination of dogs and cats may be part of an eradication programme in Member States with sylvatic rabies.

Transitional measures in the Pet Regulation that allow certain Member States to continue the application of national rules are due to expire on 31 December 2011. In order to prevent movement of non-eligible pet animals, documentary and identity checks are to be carried out at designated travellers' points of entry for pet animals coming from third countries. A series of action is foreseen in case of non-compliance with the requirements of the Pet Regulation.

