

Veterinary Facility Policy on Reporting Suspected Animal Abuse in Massachusetts



Our veterinarians, management and staff recognize that animal abuse causes significant suffering, and may be a flag for other violence in a home. Animal abuse and neglect is a crime. Veterinarians in Massachusetts are mandated to report suspicions of animal cruelty.

For these reasons, we actively support veterinary reporting of suspected animal abuse. A veterinarian may report their suspicions at any point in time, and does not need permission from a manager or owner to report. A veterinarian may consult with colleagues in the process of forming their opinion.

Reporting suspicions of animal cruelty will trigger an investigation; the reporting veterinarian is responsible to keep complete, objective & legible veterinary records. The making of a report should be brought to the attention of the manager, director or owner so the practice is not taken by surprise by an investigation, but this is not a requirement.



Signs that suggest cruelty

Beating (hitting, kicking, striking, throwing), tormenting, starving, or overworking an animal is illegal. Abandoning an animal, poisoning an animal, or leaving an animal in a situation where they are exposed to extreme heat or cold that results in injury or death is illegal. An abuser may not have the intention to harm an animal and yet may still be criminally responsible if they intended to commit the act that harmed the animal.

A caretaker must provide nutritious food, clean, potable water, appropriate shelter from the weather, grooming and veterinary care when it is needed to prevent suffering. A failure to provide an animal with what they need may be a criminal offense.



Veterinarians

In Massachusetts, veterinarians are mandated to report animal cruelty if it is encountered in the normal course of business, and you know or reasonably suspect that an animal has been a victim of cruelty, you **shall** report it to a police officer or a special state police officer.

If you report in good faith a suspected act of cruelty to animals, you cannot be held liable in civil or criminal court for filing the report.

Reports must be made to the police department in the community where the harm occurred:

Local police: () - or call 911

or the MSPCA: (800) 628-5808
or ARL: (617) 426-9170 x110



Other staff

Reception staff, veterinary technicians, kennel attendants and others may witness acts, overhear claims or for other reasons suspect animal cruelty.

If you do have suspicions, you are urged to report your concerns to a veterinarian on duty or the manager. When appropriate, keep notes of any observations that cause your suspicions.

Veterinarians and managers are expected to listen and consider staff concerns. Support staff do not have the same legal protections as veterinarians for reporting cruelty, and therefore veterinarians are responsible for reporting.



Collecting information

Gather as much information as possible in a non-confrontational manner. Try to clarify any vague, incongruous medical histories:

- How & when did this happen?
- Who was involved?
- Do you have any reason to believe someone may have harmed your animal on purpose?

Ask yourself:

- Does the history make sense and do the injuries match the history?
- Are there logical accidental or other reasons the animal could be in their condition?
- Are there clusters of injuries to this animal or to other animals in the same household?



Preserve & Document

Perform a complete exam (or necropsy). If appropriate, procure and preserve samples (matted hair, dirt, debris, semen, etc.) and label appropriately (date, time, patient id, sample description). If appropriate to the care, perform CBC, chemistry panel, fecal, urinalysis, etc. Diagnostics should be performed as would be necessary to work up any case.

If musculoskeletal injury is noted/suspected, arrange for radiographs the affected area. Consider additional images of thorax, abdomen, and limbs to document any possible previous injury or healing fracture.



Photographic record

Take photographs to document the condition of the animal from multiple vantage points with a ruler or object in the frame to indicated the size of the lesion(s); get overalls, mid-range and close up photos of any lesions. Label photos thoroughly and clearly by placing a clearly marked card next to the animal with the patient's ID, date and photographer's initials. Download these pictures to a computer folder or cloud storage for ease of sharing with investigators.

You may want to video record the first time an animal is offered water or food if you believe they have been denied adequate nutrition or water. You may also want to record any unusual behaviors.

Animal abuse is associated with other adverse outcomes for animals and families. In addition, animal cruelty may be used by abusers to emotionally control human victims.

Don't **YOU** be the reason an animal or people continue to suffer!
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