

VETERINARY IRELAND MEDIA RELEASE
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**Rabies Case in the Netherlands – Risk to Ireland Has Increased
Due to Amended Regulations**

Veterinary Ireland comment

A case of rabies in two pups imported *legally* from Bulgaria to the Netherlands was confirmed on 21st October 2013⁽¹⁾.

Ireland is amongst a small group of EU countries which had traditionally enjoyed a rabies-free status. According to Veterinary Ireland, the recent case in the Netherlands demonstrates that Ireland is exposed to an increased level of risk as a result of changes made in 2012 to EU Regulation EC998/2003 governing the movement of dogs and cats.

Commenting on behalf of Veterinary Ireland, Alan Rossiter, veterinary surgeon in Greystones, Co. Wicklow and immediate past President of Veterinary Ireland said:

“This recent case of rabies in the Netherlands in pups legally imported from Bulgaria demonstrates that the new system failed to detect and prevent rabies moving from one state to another. The risk of rabies spreading across borders still exists, even when the new import rules are adhered to.”

“It is likely that the pups were exposed to rabies before they were vaccinated in Bulgaria, but due to the long incubation period they were not yet showing any signs of disease at the time of vaccination,” said Mr. Rossiter. “Vaccination can not protect an animal that has already been exposed to a disease, it can only protect against future exposure.”

Explaining why the new system is open to failure, Mr Rossiter said:

“Up to last year the rules stipulated that dogs and cats had to essentially wait almost seven months after rabies vaccination before they could travel into Ireland from a state where they may have been exposed to rabies - and they also had to have a blood test done to make sure the rabies vaccine was effective. This was a good robust system that served us well down the years.”

“The new rules only stipulate that dogs and cats have to be vaccinated against rabies just three weeks before they can move from any member state to another. After this three week wait they can move unhindered,” said Mr. Rossiter.

“However the incubation period of rabies - the period between getting infected and first showing signs of disease - can be up to six months, or even longer. It is therefore very possible that an animal could have already been infected with rabies before it is vaccinated, and then only show symptoms several weeks to months later, long after it has arrived into its new country.”

On this scientific basis, Veterinary Ireland has long argued the potential risks associated with the new regulations, when moving dogs and cats from an area where rabies exists to an area free of rabies. “Unfortunately we have now been shown to have been correct in our fears about rabies,” said Mr. Rossiter. “This case in the Netherlands demonstrates that due

to the revised importation requirements we are at more risk than ever from this awful disease.”

Veterinary Ireland is urging the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to continue to take all steps possible to protect our valued rabies free status, and to lobby for a re-examination of the pet movement rules by the EU.

In particular and at a minimum Veterinary Ireland is calling for rigid enforcement of the regulations that are currently in place, including checking at ports that any dog or cat entering Ireland from any other state, including Britain, has a valid Pet Passport and is vaccinated against rabies.

“We know that pups are brought into Ireland from Bulgaria – indeed I saw one myself last year that was illegally imported - and what worries us deeply is these rabid pups could just as easily have arrived into Ireland as they did the Netherlands.”

Asked why we should be so worried about rabies reaching our shores, Mr Rossiter continued:

“Once an infected human shows any symptoms there is virtually no chance of recovery, and the fate suffered by victims is slow, agonising and horrendous death. 55,000 people worldwide die this death every year, mostly children in impoverished African and Asian states, with many sent home to die “because it is cheaper to move a live body than a dead body”.⁽²⁾

ENDS

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Notes to Editors

The infected pups were rescued last July from the streets of Silistra, a port town in the north of Bulgaria and bordering Romania, at about a month of age and then kept in a shelter. The vet health check and rabies vaccination was done on 2nd September and they left for the Netherlands on 3rd October, with the pup being euthanased on 18th October 2013 after a Dutch vet who became suspicious of rabies reported it to the Dutch authorities.

All the requirements for legal movement from Bulgaria to the Netherlands - vet checks, rabies vaccines, etc were complied with and the pups were found to be healthy before departure. Symptoms of rabies only became apparent two weeks after arrival in the Netherlands, a full six weeks after the vet check and rabies vaccine.

References:

1. http://www.oie.int/wahis_2/public/wahid.php/Reviewreport/Review?page_refer=MapFullEventReport&reportid=14271
2. <http://www.onehealthinitiative.com/publications/Rabies%20is%20Still%20Deadliest%20Disease,%20Yet%20Preventable.pdf>