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## **Make Sure Adopted Pets are Healthy**

**The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Vermont Department of Health and Vermont Veterinary Medical Association urge Vermonters to utilize best management practices when adopting a pet.**

Following the importation of a rabid puppy into Vermont and in anticipation of the upcoming holiday season when many Vermonters may be taking steps to add new animal members to their families, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Vermont Department of Health and the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association urge Vermonters to exercise due diligence when adopting a new dog or cat. There are steps that Vermonters can take to help ensure the animal they are adopting is healthy and the adoption organization with which they are working is compliant with Vermont law. Paying close attention to these details can increase the likelihood that adopted pets will bring many years of enjoyment to Vermont families.

At the end of September, a stray puppy from Vidalia, Georgia brokered by an out of state rescue organization was adopted by a Vermont family. Shortly after the adoption, the puppy began exhibiting signs consistent with rabies and was ultimately euthanized and tested for the disease. The pup tested positive for rabies, and more than 15 people exposed to her have received rabies postexposure vaccinations. This situation, while unusual, underscores the importance of exercising due diligence and dealing with reputable sources when adopting a new pet.

Local humane societies are wonderful locations from which to adopt because potential owners have the ability to meet animals prior to taking them home, discuss with facility personnel any behavioral issues the animal might have, and obtain a copy of the animal's vaccination and health records. Local humane societies also work closely with licensed veterinarians who assess the health of the animals in the facility, treat any medical issues, and may spay or neuter new arrivals before they are made available for adoption.

Obtaining a new pet off of the internet or from a rescue organization based out of state can be more challenging. There are good rescue organizations to choose from, but all potential new pet owners should be aware of the state laws under which these organizations must transact business so they can ensure they are working with reputable businesses. Rescue organizations doing business in Vermont must register with the Agency of Agriculture and with the Secretary of State's office. Additionally, any dog or cat that is imported into Vermont for the purpose of sale, resale or adoption must be accompanied by a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection completed by a veterinarian licensed in the animal's state of origin within 30 days of the import into Vermont. "These measures increase the likelihood that the new pet is not carrying a contagious disease that could be dangerous to humans or

other animals in the household,” said Robert Johnson, DVM, of the Health Department. “Vermonters are also strongly urged to only adopt animals that they have been able to meet in person prior to the adoption. Purchasing a dog or cat off of the internet, sight unseen, is a risky practice and makes it very difficult to determine the animal’s health status and behavioral characteristics, both of which are critical to integrating a new dog or cat into a family.”

“Adopting a new pet can be an extremely rewarding process, but it also means making a tremendous emotional and financial commitment for the entire life of that animal, which can be as much as 18 to 20 years depending on the type of pet”, noted Vermont State Veterinarian, Dr. Kristin Haas. “Healthy pets make happy owners, and we want all Vermonters to be happy with the adoption of a new family member. Taking a few additional steps up front to help ensure that a new pet is healthy and well-adjusted can help prevent disappointment down the road.” Dr. Haas recommends the following tips when adopting a new pet:

1. Work with a reputable local humane society whenever possible
2. Meet with the pet prior to adopting to ensure that its behavior and demeanor are a good match for your family
3. Obtain the animal’s medical record, vaccination history and Certificate of Veterinary Inspection if required
4. Ensure that the dog or cat is vaccinated for rabies if it is three months of age or older
5. If working with a rescue organization, ensure that the business is properly registered and licensed in the state of Vermont and in the state where the business is based, and/or with USDA Animal Care.

Vermonters can contact the Agency of Agriculture’s Animal Health office at (802)828-2421 for more information on which rescue organizations are appropriately registered or visit the Agency’s website at [www.agriculture.vermont.gov](http://www.agriculture.vermont.gov) for more information on this topic.