



# A Family Has Rehomed a Dog from Overseas. Are There Any Human Health Risks?

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There are a number of circumstances in which a pet has been rehomed overseas. The rehoming often involves an overseas post or new job abroad in which a family has brought a pet and is bringing it back or, while away, adopted a pet and is attempting to return with it. Overseas rescue pets require similar considerations. In these scenarios, the country to which the pet is being imported generally requires assurance about the animal's health and the minimal preventive healthcare as mandated by law. This generally entails at least current vaccination of the pet against rabies as well as these considerations:

## In General

### Rescued Pets & Importation

- ▶ There are a number of potential risks in the importation of a rescued pet unfamiliar to the owner.
- ▶ This practice is growing in popularity, and many charitable groups now specialize in rehoming street dogs from one country, including countries in

Asia, to families in North America or Western Europe.

- ▶ Considerations should include the welfare of the animal during a long transport, issues related to behavior, and whether the animal will be a suitable family pet.

### Zoonotic & Infectious Disease

- ▶ There are numerous potential zoonotic infectious disease risks, depending on the country or the pet's area of origin.
  - These may include endoparasitic or ectoparasitic infections or arthropod-transmitted zoonotic infections (eg, leishmaniasis, some forms of ehrlichiosis).
- ▶ Pets are often not tested for such infections before travel, and there have been instances of pets with known infections (eg, leishmaniasis) being imported and rehomed.
  - In some cases, infections of this type that are carried by imported pets might be exotic to the country in

which the animal is imported. For example, since implementation of the European Pet Passport, there have been instances in the United Kingdom (UK) of imported dogs carrying tick species that were previously unreported in the country or infections such as leishmaniasis, ehrlichiosis, and babesiosis.<sup>1-5</sup>

- ▶ Infected dogs may contribute to a national reservoir of infection, even if competent vector arthropods are not currently present in that country.
  - For example, a dog infected with *Leishmania infantum* imported into the UK from Spain poses a minimal risk for infection to the family or other pets because competent vector sand flies are not described in the UK.
  - However, alternative vectors may emerge, and autochthonous cases of transmission from an imported infected dog to a nontraveled dog in the same household have been reported.<sup>1</sup> That infected dog may

have also been a potential source of infection to other dogs via blood transfusion during mating or by vertical transmission to puppies.

- ▶ Veterinarians should be alert to the emergence of exotic diseases, particularly those with zoonotic potential, in such imported pets.
  - Some of these infections involve a chronic carrier state in an infected animal, and clinical disease may not become apparent until months or even years after importation.
  - If infectious disease screening was not performed before importation, infectious disease screening may be recommended as part of a preventive healthcare program.
- ▶ If consulting clients who are considering adopting a rescue animal from overseas, veterinarians should discuss the welfare, behavioral, and infectious disease risks with the family and encourage alternately adopting from a local animal shelter a pet that has not traveled outside its country of origin.

## Human Health

- ▶ Physicians should adopt a One Health approach to the investigation of disease—particularly infectious disease—in a family that has relocated from overseas with a pet or that may have adopted a rescue pet from overseas.
- ▶ If the family's clinical history reveals exposure of an ill patient to a traveled or imported family pet, the physician may consider consulting with the family's veterinarian to establish whether illness has also been reported in the pet or whether that animal has been screened for infectious disease since importation. ■

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