

Code of Practice for the Operation of Breeding and Rearing Businesses (2014)

July 2015 version

Animal care

This factsheet covers aspects of animal care, under the Code of Practice for the Operation of Breeding and Rearing Businesses 2014.

Why does euthanasia have to be done by a veterinarian?

The Code requires that euthanasia, except in an emergency situation, must be performed by a veterinarian, and achieved by barbiturate overdose, intravenous for adults and intraperitoneal for neonates (puppies and kittens 8 weeks old and under).

Barbiturates are scheduled drugs under the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 and the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Regulations 2006. The legislation requires that barbiturates suitable for euthanasia of dogs and cats must only be administered by a veterinarian.

What is the health management plan?

The health management plan under the Code is essentially a complete description of the operation of a breeding or rearing business. It provides protocols and standard operating procedures for the management of, and health care within a facility. The health management plan is required to be reviewed by a veterinarian annually.

What are the reasons for veterinary checks required in the Code?

Expert veterinary advice, community expectation and recommendations from breeders were used to determine the need for veterinary checks for animals in breeding and rearing businesses. The Code mandates that all animals, regardless of breeding status, receive at least an annual general health check by a vet, as recommended by the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) for all pet cats and dogs.

In addition, the Code (1 July 2015 version) specifies that female breeding dogs must have a general health check by a veterinary practitioner prior to first mating to assess whether she is physically mature enough to be bred with. Veterinary practitioners must provide a certificate to state that, at the time of examination, the female is suitable to breed. After this, a veterinary practitioner must provide a general health check within 4 weeks prior to all subsequent seasons in which the owner intends to mate the female; and within 8 weeks post-partum; OR at least once per year, whichever is more frequent.

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However if a vet requests to check an animal more frequently, then the animal must receive these extra veterinary checks in addition to the minimum requirements.

Are there mandatory requirements for vaccination and parasite prevention?

Yes. Depending on the age and the species there are a list of requirements for vaccination regimes and parasite control. As these vary between species and the age of the animal it is best to check that specific section for dogs or cats.

Why do males need rest days and what is the basis for the frequency?

Allowing a rest period should help promote healthier sperm and improve the quality and robustness of the offspring. The selected rest frequencies are based on sperm regeneration cycles, which is every 60 days for dogs, and every 47 days for cats.

Why are enrichment, exercise, socialisation and handling examples not minimum standards?

The code covers a range of breeds of dogs, including dogs that are bred for working, not just pets. It is important for the code to be flexible enough to cater for differences between breeds as well as individual differences between dogs. Therefore, the business health management plan offers the business the flexibility to write their own activities to ensure that all animals receive what they require, not just a generic list of activities/items. However, the code does state minimum time periods for exercise, enrichment socialisation and handling.

What are the requirements for breeding animals?

There are several requirements listed specifically within the code, briefly:

- All breeding animals must have at least an annual veterinary general health check (with female dogs requiring additional pre and post-partum checks), along with any additional veterinary health checks as directed by a veterinary practitioner
- Breeding mates must not be closely related (for example, father and daughter; brother and sister etc.)
- Male dogs must not be used for breeding until they are 12 months of age and require a health check first
- Male dogs must be retired at 6 years (except with veterinary certification to extend the breeding age)
- Female dogs must not be used for breeding until they are 12 months of age and require a health check first
- Female dogs cannot have more than 5 litters in their lifetime (except with veterinary certification for subsequent litters)
- Male cats must not be used for breeding until they are 12 months of age unless a veterinarian approves earlier and all males require a health check prior first mating
- Female cats must not be used for breeding until they are 12 months of age unless a veterinarian approves earlier and all females require a health check prior first mating
- Female cats cannot have more than 2 litters in a 12 month period and no more than 8 litters in their lifetime.

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Why do I need an emergency evacuation plan?

The Royal Commission into the 2009 Victorian Bushfires handed down several recommendations based on response to and recovery after the fires. One such recommendation was that Victorian animal owners needed education and support in the development of emergency evacuation plans for the animal members of households as well as the human members. Therefore, it is imperative that all businesses plan for all types of emergency situations- whether they are natural disasters or personal emergencies that affect the individuals caring for the animals at the business.

All businesses must have emergency event protocols and procedures in place, covering a range of likely emergencies. All businesses must determine if and how they will evacuate their animals in the event of a fire, flood, earthquake etc., where they might evacuate to, and how evacuation will take place. Businesses should conduct practice evacuations regularly where appropriate.

Why has the sale guarantee changed?

The sale guarantee was modified to provide both consumer and breeder protection. The Code offers a 3-day cooling off period for purchasers to return the animal for a 75% refund.

The 21-day clause provides purchasers with the opportunity to seek veterinary assurances regarding the health of their new animal within a period that would normally coincide with the next vaccination for puppies and kittens under 12 weeks of age. The original code only allowed 7 days for new owners to seek veterinary advice about concerns they had about their new animal.

The 3-year clause replaces the lifetime clause in the original code in order to protect breeders from having to compensate pet owners for health issues caused by environmental conditions during the animals life, rather than just defects/diseases that can be traced to the point of sale or identified as genetic issues. Any genetic based issues are very unlikely to be environmentally induced within the first 3 years of life.

The option for a replacement animal has been removed from the Code. Consultation with stakeholders indicated that this option was rarely used and was not considered good practice by the industry.

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