

Regulatory Update 2021 Part 4: What We Are Watching In Disease Control Legislation

Disease Control Legislation

Federal:

“The Preventing Future Pandemics Act of 2021”

The federal government continues to work towards protecting against future pandemics. On January 4, 2021, “The Preventing Future Pandemics Act of 2021” (U.S. House Resolution 151, along with its companion bill, Senate Bill 37) was introduced. This Act establishes measures to address global public health risks posed by wildlife markets, commercial markets that sell or slaughter wildlife for human consumption as food or medicine in communities where alternative nutritional or protein sources are available. Specifically, the bill prohibits importing, exporting, purchasing, or selling live wild animals in the United States for human consumption as food or medicine. It also directs the Department of the Interior to hire, train, and deploy at least 50 new U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service law enforcement attachés around the world, and the U.S. Agency for International Development to increase specified activities to address the threats and causes of zoonotic (animal-to-human transmission) disease outbreaks. Under the bill, the United States must work with other United Nations member states to urge a global ban on commercial wildlife markets and enforcement of laws to end wildlife trafficking, and the President may impose sanctions against a foreign country or foreign nationals determined to be taking certain actions that enable or facilitate commercial wildlife markets. On March 4 the bill was referred to the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security. To access the bill, click here:

<https://legiscan.com/US/bill/HB151/2021>

The Healthy Dog Importation Act of 2021

On June 29, 2021, United States Representative and veterinarian Kurt Schrader of Oregon reintroduced House Resolution 4239, “The Healthy Dog Importation Act of 2021.” (the Bill) would amend the Animal Health Protection Act’s provisions on importing live dogs and would require more stringent health screening for dogs entering the United States. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (and citing data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)), less than 1% of the million-plus dogs entering the U.S. each year are inspected for rabies, influenza, hepatitis, and distemper.

First introduced in 2020, the Bill would add requirements that imported dogs arrive in good health and have certification that a licensed veterinarian had inspected each dog and confirmed it has received all vaccinations and passed all tests required for importation by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Dogs arriving in the U.S. also would have to be at least 6 months old and be accompanied by an import permit. Under the Bill federal agencies would be directed to create an electronic database for documents and permits related to importing dogs.

On July 28 the Bill was referred to the Subcommittee on Livestock and Foreign Agriculture. On August 4 Senators Chuck Grassley of Iowa and Tina Smith of Minnesota introduced a companion bill to House Resolution 4239 in the Senate. To access the text of the Bill, click here:
<https://legiscan.com/US/text/HB4239/2021>

State:

States are pursuing disease control legislation as well. Introduced early this year, New Hampshire Senate Bill 146 is Omnibus legislation relative to the environment that would prohibit the importation or transportation of certain animals and fish into the state. As currently written, the live animal market provisions concern animals sold to consumers for purposes of human consumption. The bill is pending a final vote. In New York, Assembly Bill 2054 and companion Senate Bill 6047 prohibit certain wildlife and fish from being imported into the state in order to protect public health and safety, native wildlife and fish, and the agricultural interests of the state; and create a new Article 22-A relating to the operation of live animal markets. The live animal market provisions in Article 22 reference animals sold to consumers for the purpose of human consumption, but the wildlife import restrictions in Article 11 relate to all animal imports.

A bill is pending in the California Senate (California Senate Bill 376) that provides for certain prohibitions on possession, transportation, and importation of wild animals as well as live animal markets. On April 1, Indiana enacted a new law requiring that a veterinarian, owner, caretaker, or custodian of an animal who knows or suspects that an animal has a disease or condition declared reportable by the state board of animal health (board) to report the existence of the disease or condition to the state veterinarian or local health officer not later than 24 hours (currently 48 hours) after discovering the occurrence or suspected occurrence of the disease or condition.

Rabies Control

Although dog rabies has been eliminated in the United States since 2007, the disease remains prevalent in many countries, killing 59,000 people annually worldwide. As such, it's prevention continues to be an important issue for both the federal and state governments.

On June 14, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced that, effective July 14, it was temporarily suspending the importation of dogs from 113 countries classified as high risk for dog rabies. The suspension applies to all dogs, including puppies and emotional support dogs, and dogs that are returning to the United States after travelling to the designated high-risk countries. It also includes dogs arriving from other non-risk countries if they also have been in a high-risk country during the previous six months.

According to Emily Pieracci, a CDC veterinary medical officer, during the COVID pandemic over the last year "there has been a significant increase in the number of dogs that are being imported and presenting fraudulent or falsified rabies vaccination certificates." <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-cdc-suspend-import-dogs-more-than-100-countries-over-rabies-concerns-2021-06-14/> Countries listed in the ban include Russia, China, India, Brazil, Peru, Kenya, El Salvador, Guatemala, Belarus, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Jordan, Ecuador, Cuba, Malaysia, Indonesia, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia.

The CDC's announcement can be accessed here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/importation/bringing-an-animal-into-the-united-states/high-risk.html> (CDC)

Also this month the CDC launched a multi-state public health investigation after at least 12 people were exposed to a dog that tested positive for a rabies variant after being imported from Azerbaijan by a rescue group.

The dog, along with 32 other dogs and one cat, arrived at Chicago O'Hare International Airport on June 10. None of the other animals have tested positive, but all are considered to have been exposed, according to the CDC.

CDC testing indicated that the dog was infected with rabies before it arrived in the United States. The animals were transported to California, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania. CDC investigators are working with the unidentified rescue organization to identify all the places the exposed animals went, including rescues and foster homes. "This virus variant is present in a lot of other countries, and it took us decades to get rid of it here," said Ryan Wallace, a veterinary medical officer with the U.S. Public Health Service who also leads the rabies epidemiology unit at the CDC.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/06/19/dog-rabies-azerbaijan/>

The states also have been active on the rabies front. For example, early this month Delaware signed into law a new statute clarifying the definition and reporting requirements regarding animals exposed to rabies as well as clarifying and modifying the responsibilities and liability of animal owners regarding animals suspected of having been exposed to rabies or having exposed humans to rabies. Nebraska passed legislation in September that updated its rabies vaccination regulations. There is currently a bill pending in New Hampshire (New Hampshire House Bill 332) that would require a color photo of a dog, cat, or ferret on a rabies vaccination certificate.

Update on Multistate Outbreak of Salmonella Typhimurium Infections Linked to Small Pet Turtles

On June 17, the CDC posted an update on its investigation of a multistate occurrence of human Salmonella Typhimurium infections linked to contact with small pet turtles. In addition to adding 11 new illness cases, the CDC also has identified a second, separate outbreak of Salmonella Poona infections also linked to small turtles.

Between August 27, 2020, and May 23, 2021, forty-two cases of human Salmonella Typhimurium infections and 22 cases of human Salmonella Poona cases have been reported in 17 states and the District of Columbia. Thirty-seven people (of those interviewed) reported contact with pet turtles before becoming ill. Those infected ranged in age from less than one year to 59, with a median age of six. Twenty-six people have been hospitalized and there has been one death reported from Pennsylvania.

For the CDC announcement, click here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/typhimurium-02-21/index.html> (CDC)