

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2014 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 1204 (Delegate Dumais, *et al.*)
Environmental Matters

Public Health - Dog Bites - Proof of Rabies Vaccination Required

This bill requires the owner of a dog that bites a human to provide the bite victim with proof that the dog has been adequately vaccinated against rabies. The bill establishes a \$100 civil penalty for dog owners who fail to provide required proof.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill is not anticipated to materially affect State operations or finances.

Local Effect: The bill is not anticipated to materially affect local government operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: Adequate proof under the bill can be in the form of a vaccination certificate issued by a licensed veterinarian, a vaccination record kept by a licensed veterinarian, or a license or registration issued by a county that indicates the dog has been adequately vaccinated against rabies.

Current Law: Every dog owner must have the dog adequately vaccinated against rabies. A county may not register or license a dog unless the person who owns the dog submits proof that the dog is adequately vaccinated against rabies with the application for registration or license. The public health veterinarian is charged with determining whether the proof of vaccination is acceptable. A veterinarian administering a rabies vaccine must keep a record of the vaccination for five years.

An individual must report to the local police or sheriff, or in Frederick County to the animal control center of Frederick County, if that individual knows or suspects that an animal or another individual has been exposed to a possible rabies infection.

Once reported, the police, sheriff, or animal control center staff must notify the health officer for the county where the report is made and enforce any subsequent orders from the health officer and the public health veterinarian. If an order to surrender an animal is issued, a person may not hide the animal. Any person who fails to comply is guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to a fine up to \$500.

Background: There is no uniform collection of dog bite data in the United States, and no national agency in charge of collecting dog bite data. As a result, it is difficult to draw conclusions on dog bite trends. Dog bite data is collected by different entities and under different circumstances. Data is collected by hospitals, animal control departments, government agencies, and various interest groups. Data can be self reported, collected from hospital administrative records, or collected in surveys.

A dog bite incident is defined and verified by the data collecting entity, which range in their qualifications and standards. A “dog bite” could include anything from a benign nip to a severe bite. In some circumstances, coding decisions by some organizations could result in a scratch being tallied as a bite incident. In addition, information on the circumstances surrounding the incident, such as whether the dog was provoked, is not usually collected.

In Maryland, local health departments report on a monthly basis to the State Public Health Veterinarian at the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) on animal bites to humans in each county, broken down by species. A representative from DHMH, however, cautioned that the county breakdown for this data could be unreliable because counties define “bite” differently and use different tracking and reporting systems.

On the national level, the most reliable information on dog bites is collected through samples of hospital administrative data. Nationally, representative samples of hospital inpatient and emergency department data allow research on national dog bite trends with limited problems from duplicate reports of the same incident, self reporting errors, varying definitions and verification standards, and political bias. This data still provides an incomplete picture, however, because the vast majority of dog bites are not severe enough to warrant a trip to the emergency room.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Baltimore City; Harford and Montgomery counties; Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; Maryland Association of Counties; Maryland Association of County Health Officers; Department of Legislative Services

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Analysis by: Kathleen P. Kennedy

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510