

# Veterinarians Consumer Fact Sheet

## **Board of Registration of Veterinarians**

Veterinarians generally diagnose, treat, and prescribe for disease, pain or injury in animals. The Board of Registration in Veterinary Medicine licenses those applicants who have received a doctor's degree in veterinary medicine from an approved school and pass the national exams and the state's jurisprudence exam with grades considered satisfactory by the Board.

The Board protects the public by monitoring the practices of the veterinarians it licenses to insure that they practice according to the laws of Massachusetts and the Board's established standards and code of conduct. The Board works to recognize and address the needs and demands of the profession in a timely fashion.

Each board of registration administers and enforces its regulations regarding licensing requirements. The boards receive, investigate and adjudicate complaints against the respective licensed practitioners.

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## **Veterinarian**

Doctors of Veterinary Medicine are medical professionals, whose primary responsibility is protecting the health and welfare of animals and people. Veterinarians diagnose and control animal diseases, treat sick and injured animals, prevent the transmission of animal diseases ("zoonoses") to people, and advise owners on proper care of pets and livestock. They ensure a safe food supply by maintaining the health of food animals. Veterinarians are also involved in wildlife preservation and conservation and public health of the human population.

Today's veterinarians are members of an important health profession. In taking the veterinarian's oath, a doctor solemnly swears to use his or her scientific knowledge and skills "for the benefit of society, through the protection of animal health, the relief of animal suffering, the conservation of livestock resources, the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge."

Today more than 58,000 veterinarians are professionally active in the United States. They provide a wide variety of services in private clinical practice, teaching, research, government service, public health, military service, private industry, and other areas.

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## **Choosing a Veterinarian**

Selecting a veterinarian for your pet is a personal choice, as is selecting your family physician or dentist. And, the criteria you use in choosing a physician or dentist is similar. What is important to you? Location? Convenient hours of service? Friendliness and service commitment of doctors and staff? Fees?

In selecting a veterinarian, your goals should be to find the doctor that best meets your needs and to establish a long-term relationship. It's important to find a veterinarian who is knowledgeable about the type of pet you have. Your veterinarian should be someone who makes you feel comfortable. This person should be someone you can develop a personal client/veterinarian relationship with. Your veterinarian should take time to answer your questions about your pet and its health.

The veterinarian will maintain a history of your pet, including health records that detail immunizations, reactions to medications, behavior traits, etc. So, it's important to see your veterinarian for all your pet's health care needs. Your veterinarian will know the best preventive and critical care to provide with your pet's individual health care needs in mind.

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## **Where to look for a veterinarian**

### **Ask a Friend**

Animal-owning friends are a good source of information. Ask them what they like about their veterinarian. But remember, their ideal choice may not be yours.

### **Breed Clubs**

If you have a specific breed of dog, cat or bird, breed clubs can be a good source of information.

### **Local Directories**

The business pages of a phone book or yellow pages normally provide information on local veterinarians.

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## **When to look for a Veterinarian**

It is a good idea to start thinking about selecting a veterinarian before a new pet becomes a member of your family. In fact, a veterinarian can assist you in selecting a pet that complements your personality, work schedule and home life.

If you've just moved, you will want to locate a veterinarian soon. Don't wait until your pet becomes ill; you want to establish a relationship right away. Your veterinarian can provide you with information on special climate concerns for your pet. In addition, since traveling can be a stressful experience for a pet, an early check-up may be in order.

Schedule a visit to meet the veterinarians who have been recommended and to discuss your pet and your expectations. You may wish to visit several practices before you make a decision.

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## **Other Things to Consider**

### **Office Hours**

- What are regular office hours?
- Are they compatible with your schedule?
- Who covers the practice when the doctor is unavailable?

### **Professional Staff**

- How are routine telephone calls handled?
  - Can you request an appointment with a specific veterinarian?
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## **Trade Associations**

### **American Association of Veterinary State Boards**

4106 Central

Kansas City, MO 64111

Phone: (816) 931-1504

Fax: (816) 931-1604

E-mail: [info@aavsb.org](mailto:info@aavsb.org)

### **American Veterinary Medical Association**

1931 North Meacham Road - Suite 100

Schaumburg, IL 60173

Phone: 847-925-8070

Fax: 847-925-1329

E-mail: [AVMAINFO@avma.org](mailto:AVMAINFO@avma.org)

**AVMA Governmental Relations Division**

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Washington, D.C. 20005

Phone: 202-789-0007

Fax: 202-842-4360

E-mail: [avmagrd@avma.org](mailto:avmagrd@avma.org)

**Massachusetts Veterinary Medical Association**

169 Lakeside Ave, Marlboro, MA 01752

(508)-460-9333


E-mail: [massvet@ma.ultranet.com](mailto:massvet@ma.ultranet.com)

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**Filing a Complaint**

While the majority of licensees conduct themselves as true professionals, the Division of Professional Licensure will take action against those who fail to maintain acceptable standards of competence and integrity.

In many cases, complaints are made by dissatisfied consumers - but, dissatisfaction alone is not proof of incompetence or sufficient grounds for disciplinary action.

If you have a serious complaint against a licensed veterinarian, call or write the Division's Office of Investigations and ask for a complaint form. Or download a copy of the [complaint form](#)  .

Division of Professional Licensure

Office of Investigations

1000 Washington Street, Suite 710

Boston, Mass. 02118

(617) 727-7406