

Veterinary Euthanasia

Published: November 2016
Revised: July 2019, May 2021

Introduction

The decision to euthanize an animal can be an emotional and difficult time for clients and for veterinarians. It can also raise complex issues for veterinarians when deciding whether to perform euthanasia, refuse to perform euthanasia, or recommend the performance of euthanasia. The College recognizes the complexity of decision-making by a veterinarian when recommending euthanasia for an animal or group of animals. This standard sets out the College's expectations related to euthanasia performed by a veterinarian.

Definitions

Client: Client means, with respect to a veterinarian, the owner of an animal(s) or group of animals that the veterinarian is treating, an authorized representative of the owner or an individual who the member reasonably determines is acting in the interest of the animal(s) or group of animals.

Veterinary Euthanasia: Veterinary Euthanasia is the practice of deliberately ending the life of an animal or group of animals using humane methods that minimize pain and distress.



Practice Expectations

A veterinarian meets the *Professional Practice Standard: Veterinary Euthanasia* when they:

1. Perform euthanasia only in the context of a veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) or in accordance with the authority provided by provincial and/ or federal animal welfare legislation.
2. Verify the legal ownership and identification of an animal or group of animals, to the best of their ability, prior to performing euthanasia.
3. Document in the medical record that the client has provided informed client consent prior to the performance of euthanasia in accordance with the Professional Practice Standard: Informed Client Consent.
4. Recommend that a client seek out another veterinarian who performs euthanasia if they do not perform euthanasia, or refuse to perform euthanasia in a particular case, inclusive of reasons.
5. Explain the process of performing euthanasia, including the visible effects that may occur, the length of time the process will take, and any after-effects that may be expected, if the client wishes to remain present during the process.
6. Follow species-specific accepted practices with respect to the method of performing euthanasia, and ensure that:
 - the method chosen is humane;
 - the method chosen minimizes pain and distress; and
 - the method chosen provides for safe animal handling and restraint, including the safety of the veterinarian, veterinary team, and other individuals present.
7. Delegate the performance of euthanasia after determining the necessary level of supervision (immediate, direct, or indirect) for the task in accordance with the Professional Practice Standard: Delegation.
8. Confirm the death of the animal or group of animals.



Disposal of Remains

9. Clearly identify the remains of the animal or group of animals following the performance of euthanasia, as applicable to the practice context.
10. Assure themselves with a reasonable degree of certainty of a client's preferences with respect to the method of disposal of the remains of the animal or group of animals.
11. Understand that the disposal of the remains of any animal must be executed in accordance with the provisions of the *Veterinarians Act*, the *Environmental Protection Act*, Ontario deadstock regulations, *Accreditation Standards for Veterinary Facilities in Ontario*, any applicable municipal by-laws, and any other legal requirements. Consider and employ biosecurity best practices to avoid biosecurity hazards.

Additional Considerations

12. Understand that they have an obligation to report animal abuse or neglect to a provincial animal welfare inspector when they have reasonable grounds to believe that an animal or group of animals have been abused or neglected in circumstances that require euthanasia.
13. Ask questions about biting or other contact incidents that could result in the transmission of the rabies virus to a person that occurred within the 10 days preceding the planned euthanasia of an animal or group of animals. Manage the euthanasia of an animal or group of animals involved in such incidents in accordance with the relevant provincial legislation and regulation as outlined in the *Legislative Overview: Rabies*.

Guide to the Standard

A separate *Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Veterinary Euthanasia* has been developed by the College and can be found on the Colleges' website www.cvo.org.



Legislative Authority

R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 1093: General, s. 1, 17(1) 21, 17(1) 22, 17(1) 22.1, 18, 19, 27, 28, 33(2)(f) (*Veterinarians Act*)
Animals for Research Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. A.22
R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 557, Communicable Diseases - General s. 2 (*Health Protection and Promotion Act*)
O. Reg. 106/09: Disposal of Dead Farm Animals (*Nutrient Management Act*)
O. Reg. 105/09: Disposal of Deadstock (*Food Safety and Quality Act*)
Environmental Protection Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.19 and regulations
Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act, 2019, S.O. 2019 c. 13
Livestock Community Sales Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. L.22
O. Reg. 31/05: Meat, 2001, S.O. 2001, c. 20, s. 84.1 (*Food Safety and Quality Act*)
Accreditation Standards for Veterinary Facilities in Ontario, Titles 6 and 12, clause 13.4

Resources

The following can be found at the College's website at cvo.org:

1. *Professional Practice Standard: Informed Client Consent*
2. *Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Informed Client Consent*
3. *Professional Practice Standard: Medical Records*
4. *Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Medical Records*
5. *Professional Practice Standard: Prescribing a Drug*
6. *Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Prescribing a Drug*
7. *Professional Practice Standard: Dispensing a Drug*
8. *Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Dispensing a Drug*
9. *Professional Practice Standard: Extra-Label Drug Use*
10. *Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Extra-Label Drug Use*
11. *Professional Practice Standard: Use of Compounded Drugs in Veterinary Practice*
12. *Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Use of Compounded Drugs in Veterinary Practice*
13. *Professional Practice Standard: Management and Disposal of Controlled Drugs*
14. *Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Management and Disposal of Controlled Drugs*
15. *Professional Practice Standard: Delegation*
16. *Professional Practice Standard: Establishing, Maintaining, and Discontinuing a Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR)*
17. *Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Establishing, Maintaining, and Discontinuing a Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR)*
18. *Professional Practice Standard: Humane Animal Handling and Restraint*
19. *Position Statement: Reporting Animal Abuse or Neglect*



20. Legislative Overview: Rabies

21. Legislative Overview: Mandatory Reporting

Additional Resources

Codes of Practice – National Farm Animal Care Council American Veterinary Medical Association
Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals: 2020 Edition

College publications contain practice parameters and standards which should be considered by all Ontario veterinarians in the care of their patients and in the practice of the profession. College publications are developed in consultation with the profession and describe current professional expectations. It is important to note that these College publications may be used by the College or other bodies in determining whether appropriate standards of practice and professional responsibilities have been maintained. The College encourages you to refer to the website (www.cvo.org) to ensure you are referring to the most recent version of any document.