



# Board of Health

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## **Rabies Vaccination Exemption Policy**

Rabies is a viral disorder affecting the brain and spinal cord of mammals. Although rare in humans due to public health measures, it is still common in wildlife in many areas of the country, including Massachusetts. Once contracted, the disease is nearly 100% fatal.

Massachusetts General Law Chapter 140, Section 145B mandates that all dogs and cats in the commonwealth be vaccinated against rabies. M.G.L. Chapter 140, Section 137 requires certification of vaccination prior to the issuance of a dog license. This same section provides local boards of health the authority to grant exemptions to these provisions.

In order to protect the health and well-being of the citizens of Sherborn, as well as that of our domestic animals, the Board of Health supports the goal of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in preventing rabies in our community. In reaching this goal, the Board believes that all dogs and cats should be vaccinated against rabies.

The Board of Health will evaluate any request where a licensed veterinarian certifies that an animal is too infirm to receive a rabies inoculation, and that the vaccine would have a deleterious effect on the animal's health. The Board may decline such a request in the interest of public health. If the Board approves such a request, it will be on the condition that the animal be considered in isolation and is not to be allowed outdoors unless on a leash and in the control of an adult.

The Board of Health is aware that there are those in the veterinary community who believe that regularly scheduled booster immunizations for rabies are unnecessary and that the demonstration of serum rabies titers are sufficient in determining immunity. However, the Centers for Disease Control and The Commonwealth of Massachusetts state that titers should not be used as proof of immunity. The Board of Health will continue to follow accepted scientific standards and not take into consideration rabies titers when determining if an animal qualifies for rabies vaccine exemption. We would also discourage these tests being performed.