

Lack of rabies antibodies in dogs imported from Russia to Finland

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Background

- Since the beginning of 2018, 55 commercially imported dogs from Russia have been sampled for rabies antibodies in order to verify their rabies vaccination status.
- All these dogs fulfilled the documentary requirements for entry into the Union

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Results of antibody testing

- 40 % (n=22) zero antibodies
- 13 % (n=7) titer less than 0.5
- 47 % (n=26) titer 0.5 or more

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What to think of this?

- According to a French study by Cliquet et al 2003, of 17693 sampled dogs 7,4 % had antibody titre less than 0.5IU/ml. Of the primovaccinated dogs the prevalence of low antibody titer was 14,5 %.



Natural variation **can not** explain the detected 40 % level of dogs without any rabies antibodies

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Why are these findings alarming?

- In 2017 almost thousand dogs were commercially imported from Russia to Finland. 95 % of these were rescue dogs from Russian shelters and many of them were captured from the street.
- Some of these shelters receive dogs from areas where rabies occurs regularly both in domestic dogs and wildlife (for example Moscow area)
- Shelter dogs have often behavioral issues particularly during rehoming period which may lead to biting incidents

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Public health dilemma- do these dogs pose a rabies risk?

- Post exposure treatment for rabies is recommended to be started within 24 hours in category II and III contacts (bites = category III).
- In case of a bite from a newly imported former street dog from rabies infected area, very few public health personnel dare to delay the treatment of bitten individual until rabies has been ruled out
-> In short the answer to the question is YES

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We wonder

- Have other member states observed similar lack of antibodies in dogs which have been imported from Russia?
- What measures are taken in other member states in cases where antibody titers do not at all support the rabies vaccination documentation?
- Provided that our findings are part of a wide phenomenon affecting multiple member states, is it still justifiable that rabies antibody titration test is not required for dogs imported from Russia?

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Thank you for your attention!

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