

Animal adoption guidelines

(adopted 04/10/2018)

The policies and positions of the RSPCA referred to in this document represent the guiding principles to which we aspire in fulfilling our various roles. We are committed to giving effect to these principles wherever possible and practical.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This position paper must be read in conjunction with the following RSPCA policies:
- Policy A1 Responsible companion animal ownership
 - Policy A2 Acquiring a companion animal
 - Policy A4 Adoption of RSPCA animals
 - Policy B4 Farm animal husbandry and management
 - Policy C3 Working animals.
- 1.2 The RSPCA aims to encourage responsible animal ownership and to ensure that the adoption of an animal from an RSPCA shelter is a positive experience for the new owner, the adopted animal and the wider community. To ensure that the owner will be able to meet the needs of the animal, and that the match between an animal and their new owner is appropriate, the RSPCA implements the following guidelines at its shelters.
- 1.3 These guidelines apply primarily to the adoption of animals kept as companions (pets) in a domestic household. Procedures for the adoption of other animals may differ in some details but should be consistent with the general principles outlined here.
- 1.4 A summary of the recommended minimum pre-adoption requirements for different types of animals is provided in **Table A**.

2 Veterinary health check and vaccinations

- 2.1 A veterinary health check is undertaken on all RSPCA shelter animals to determine whether the animal is fit and healthy, and veterinary treatment is implemented as appropriate.
- 2.2 Animals at RSPCA shelters receive core vaccines against infectious diseases as appropriate for the species and in accordance with legislative requirements. Recommended minimum vaccination requirements are shown in Table A. In some areas additional vaccinations or treatments may be given or recommended to new owners.
- 2.3 An animal with an infectious disease or health condition may be adopted provided that:
- a* Based on veterinary advice, the RSPCA is fully satisfied that the condition will not cause the animal undue stress or discomfort or result in a poor quality of life.
 - b* A combination of disease management and animal management can reasonably mitigate risks to humans and other animals in the community.

- c The condition and requirements for care, including associated costs and RSPCA indemnity, are fully disclosed to prospective owners.
- d The RSPCA believes that the prospective owner is able to meet the needs, both current and future, of the animal.

3 Behavioural assessment

- 3.1 The behaviour of animals at RSPCA shelters is observed and assessed prior to making them available for adoption, to help ensure that the animal is appropriate for adoption and to determine the behavioural needs of the animal.
- 3.2 All adult dogs (and puppies 4 months or older) at RSPCA shelters undergo a detailed and standardised behavioural assessment prior to adoption. For other species, and for young puppies, behaviour is assessed by observation and during handling, as appropriate for the species (see Table A).
- 3.3 If an animal is observed to exhibit behaviour that presents a danger to the community, other animals or indicates an underlying welfare concern during the pre-adoption period, its suitability for adoption will be more fully assessed by the appropriate shelter staff (including veterinary and behaviour staff). A behaviour modification program (BMP) will be introduced as appropriate and the animal assessed again after the BMP to determine adoptability.
- 3.4 An animal with a behavioural condition may be adopted provided that:
 - a Based on veterinary or appropriately trained staff advice, the RSPCA is fully satisfied that the condition will not cause the animal undue stress or discomfort or result in a poor quality of life.
 - b Other people or animals in the community will not be placed at undue risk because of the animal's condition.
 - c The condition and requirements for care, including associated costs, are fully disclosed to prospective owners.
 - d The RSPCA believes that the prospective owner is able to meet the physiological, behavioural and social needs, both current and future, of the animal.

4 Desexing

- 4.1 All dogs, cats, rabbits and ferrets are desexed prior to adoption. RSPCA Australia recommends desexing from the age of eight weeks when the surgery is simple and recovery is rapid and straightforward. Desexing, prior to sexual maturity, is an effective strategy for reducing the number of unwanted cats and dogs in the community and ensures compliance with desexing requirements.
- 4.2 All other species are desexed where appropriate (see Table A). For some animals, such as small rodents, birds, reptiles and livestock, desexing may not be feasible or necessary. Where entire animals are adopted, the RSPCA provides prospective new owners with husbandry advice at adoption to encourage responsible ownership and to minimise unnecessary breeding of animals.

5 Pre-adoption process

- 5.1 RSPCA shelter staff will conduct a pre-adoption conversation with prospective new owners to determine the type of animal best suited to their lifestyle and preferences. Every effort will be made to ensure a good match between the animal and owner. All members of the household (including existing animals) should be considered in the decision to adopt an animal and in the selection of that animal.
- 5.2 The following issues may be covered in this pre-adoption conversation:
- a Expectations of the prospective owner and the reasons for wanting an animal.
 - b The long-term costs and commitment associated with animal ownership.
 - c Basic requirements for the care of the animal including diet, space, housing, environmental enrichment, exercise etc.
 - d Relevant laws relating to the keeping of animals, such as the construction of animal housing and restrictions on the numbers or types of animals that can be kept. It is the responsibility of owners to be aware of and to comply with the laws of their area.
 - e The residential circumstances of the prospective new owner including conditions pertaining to rental agreements.
 - f Lifestyle of the owner/household (e.g. available time, age, activity level etc.), the attributes of the animal and whether their needs will be able to be met including providing good quality of life for the animal.
 - g Compatibility and health status (vaccinations, age, etc.) of other animals in the household. The adoption of an animal must not be detrimental to existing animals or the adopted animal. Where other animals are present in a household the owners must be able to meet the needs of their existing animals as well as any additional animals.
 - h Any special needs (including, but not limited to, health or behavioural needs) that relate to the individual animal, species or breed that need to be considered by the prospective new owner.
- 5.3 To maximise the likelihood of a successful adoption, wherever possible there should be a meeting between the prospective new owner and the chosen animal prior to adoption.
- 5.4 In cases where a meeting is not possible (i.e. long-distance adoptions), additional steps should be taken to ensure a successful adoption, including:
- a Contacting the prospective owner's veterinarian to confirm previous pet ownership and attendance.
 - b Making appropriate transport and pick-up arrangements.
 - c Contacting the owner to ensure that the animal has arrived safely and providing post-adoption support as required.

- 5.5 Where practical, follow up contact will be undertaken to provide ongoing support and additional advice to new owners.

6 Criteria for refusing adoption of an animal

The RSPCA reserves the right to refuse the adoption of an animal to any person. Reasons for refusal may include:

- a* The RSPCA has reason to believe that the area where the animal is to be housed is not safe or may have a detrimental impact on the animal.
- b* The person is known to have been found guilty of cruelty to or neglect of animals or is the subject of an existing or ongoing investigation.
- c* The person is under the age of 18 years old (proof of age may be requested).
- d* The person has a known recent history of surrender of animals, for reasons that are not consistent with responsible ownership.
- e* The interaction between the prospective new owners and the prospective new animal, or an existing animal, raises concerns about the potential rehoming of the animal.
- f* The RSPCA considers that the person seeking to adopt is unlikely to be able to meet the needs of the animal or other animal/s they own.
- g* The animal is to be used for activities where injury, pain, suffering or distress is likely to be caused.
- h* The RSPCA has reasonable suspicion that the person's judgement is affected by drugs and/or alcohol.
- i* Written approval that animals may be kept on premises during tenancy has not been provided from the agent or landlord.
- j* The adoption would breach the local or state government regulations in which the prospective new owners are residing.
- k* The person has the intention of 'on-selling' the animal (excluding rescue organisations).

Table A Recommended minimum pre-adoption requirements for animals at RSPCA shelters

Animal ¹	Method of identification	Desexing	Vaccinations ²	Assessment of behaviour
Dogs ³	Microchip	Yes	C5 (parvovirus, distemper, hepatitis, <i>Bordetella bronchiseptica</i> , parainfluenza)	Detailed behavioural assessment for adult dogs and puppies 4 months or older. Observation/handling for puppies under 4 months. Behavioural history if available.
Cats ³	Microchip	Yes	F3 (feline panleucopenia, feline herpesvirus, feline calicivirus)	Observation/handling. Behavioural history if available.
Rabbits	Microchip	Yes	Calicivirus	Observation/handling
Guinea-pigs	Optional microchip	Optional	No	Basic handling
Ferrets	Optional microchip	Yes	C3 (parovirus, distemper, hepatitis)	Observation/handling
Mice	Optional microchip	Optional	No	Basic handling
Rats	Optional microchip	Optional	No	Basic handling
Birds (as companion animals)	Optional microchip	No	No	Basic handling
Reptiles	Optional microchip	No	No	Basic handling
Cattle	As required under NLIS ⁴	Optional	5 in 1 vaccine (pulpy kidney (enterotoxaemia), black disease, tetanus, blackleg, malignant oedema)	Basic handling
Sheep	As required under NLIS ⁴	Optional	5 in 1 vaccine (pulpy kidney (enterotoxaemia), black disease, tetanus, blackleg, malignant oedema)	Basic handling
Pigs	Tattoo ⁵	Optional	None	Basic handling
Poultry	Nil	No	None	Basic handling
Horses	Microchip	Optional	2 in 1 vaccine (tetanus, strangles) ⁶	Basic handling
Donkeys	Optional microchip	Optional	Tetanus	Basic handling
Goats	As required under NLIS ⁴	Optional	5 in 1 vaccine (pulpy kidney (enterotoxaemia), black disease, tetanus,	Basic handling

			blackleg, malignant oedema)	
Alpacas	Microchip	Optional	5 in 1 vaccine (pulpy kidney (enterotoxaemia), black disease, tetanus, blackleg, malignant oedema)	Basic handling

¹ Requirements and restrictions on companion animal ownership vary across States and Territories. Prospective owners should contact their local RSPCA for more information.

² These are minimum recommended vaccination regimes nationally; additional vaccinations may be recommended in some areas

³ All dogs and cats must receive internal and external parasite control in accordance with regional requirements. Other species should be wormed as necessary. Worming regimes should follow the manufacturer’s specifications.

⁴ National livestock identification scheme

⁵ Requirements on pig identification vary across States and Territories.