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Albuquerque Environmental Health
Vector-Borne & Zoonotic Disease Division
P.O. Box 1293
Albuquerque, NM 87103

November 27, 2007

Yvonne,

I am writing to address your request to the Vector-Borne & Zoonotic Disease Division for guidance on the local requirements for vaccination of staff enlisted to assist in rescuing and relocating prairie dogs.

There are no requirements enforced at the local level regarding vaccination of your personnel. As you have already been informed, CDC also does not list any required vaccinations for handling prairie dogs. We typically adhere to CDC guidance in such matters, and certainly I find no justification to set forth any additional requirements. I would suggest that your health and safety guidelines be outlined in detail, but we will not require any vaccination regimen to be a part of them.

If I may, I would like to suggest some included language in your bid be directed towards the safety and health of your staff in the rare event of a possible exposure to disease. I would not expect tetanus vaccination to be required following a bite, however it is probably a good measure to have staff vaccinated on the prescribed basis for their own safety when working in the field. Although there is no evidence that suggest that prairie dogs are carriers of rabies virus, they are mammals, and therefore susceptible to becoming infected with it. Like most mammals, they would become ill and die within a relatively short period of time, however there could be a period where transmission to humans through a bite would be possible. Although this is not likely to happen, I feel that a statement should be included in your operating procedures that addresses the possibility. I would suggest that in the event that a person is bitten by a prairie dog that appears to be ill or acting strangely, the animal be surrendered for rabies testing and the person be given prophylactic vaccination as a precaution. Although this may be overly cautious, it would limit liability for both the City and Prairie Dog Pals. In addition, the testing should include plague/tularemia screening in case the sick animal represents the first stage of a plague epizootic. Although plague would destroy the entire colony within a short period, there would be a short time where infectious animals would still be alive, although ill. I believe both of our agencies

benefit from exercising caution regarding this possibility. Again, I do not think there is any need to test an animal or administer prophylaxis to the person bitten if the animal appears to be in good health; only if it exhibits unusual or unhealthy behaviour or symptoms.

I recognize your considerable experience in the handling of prairie dogs, and offer this advice merely as a recommended practice for the health and safety of your colleagues.

If I can offer any other assistance, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

Mark DiMenna
Manager
Vector-Borne & Zoonotic Disease Division

cc: Suzanne Boehland, Purchasing Division
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