

Getting a Grip on Infectious Diseases

New manual helps shelters battle a common problem

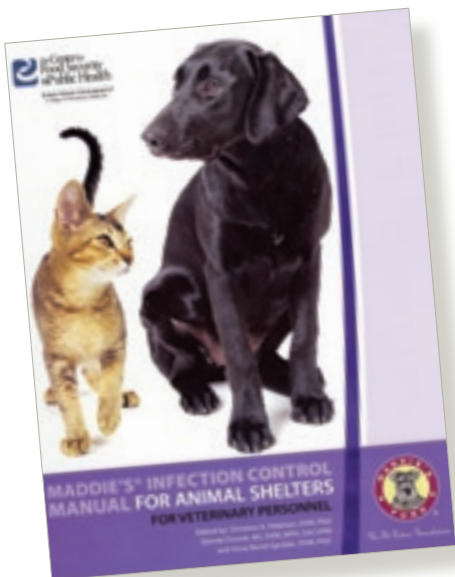
BY JAMES HETTINGER

Maybe you can't banish every single infectious particle that drifts into your shelter, but you can take steps to contain them.

That's one of the messages in *Maddie's Infection Control Manual for Animal Shelters*, a handbook for veterinarians and veterinary students recently published by Iowa State University's Center for Food Security and Public Health, with support from Maddie's Fund.

Written by a host of experts and edited by veterinarians Christine A. Petersen, Glenda Dvorak, and Anna Rovid Spickler, the book lays out the principles of infection control for animal shelters, then devotes chapters to "Disinfection 101" and the development of policies and protocols to battle infectious diseases. Each chapter includes a shelter scenario illustrating a real-life dilemma in infection control.

The manual concludes with a chapter of handouts and signs designed to educate shelter staff and potential adopters about preventing infectious and zoonotic



diseases. Readers will find everything from fact sheets on flea control to posters on the proper method for hand washing. Printable versions of the handouts are available on a CD ROM that accompanies the book.

“Infection control is vital in animal shelters, where newly introduced animals carry a variety of pathogens, stressed animals are vulnerable to infection and crowded conditions promote the spread of disease,” the authors note. Left unchecked, disease transmission can cause otherwise adoptable animals to be euthanized, threaten the health of workers and adopters, and temporarily shutter the shelter’s doors.

While shelters might provide a perfect storm of conditions for the introduction and spread of disease, *Maddie’s Infection Control Manual for Animal Shelters* argues that the challenges can be addressed—starting with an infection control plan. The plan should cover maintaining animals’ health, giving appropriate vaccinations, following effective cleaning and disinfection protocols, educating staff, and making sure facilities are properly designed and managed.

Preventing diseases from entering your shelter is generally easier and more cost-effective than trying to control an outbreak, the manual notes, and proper disinfection is a key to prevention. The book outlines the strengths and weaknesses of the chemicals used for disinfection, as well as how to choose the right product and develop a disinfection protocol. The manual recommends that shelters develop written policies and protocols for all common medical conditions, infectious or not, while paying particular attention to diseases that may spread. “It is especially important to have clear policies and protocols for infectious conditions,” the authors write, “because failure to recognize or respond appropriately puts not only the animal and perhaps adopter at risk, but it may also jeopardize the whole shelter population.”

Before a policy or protocol can be activated, the shelter must recognize the presence of the disease—a tricky task, since few diseases can be recognized with

100 percent accuracy. It’s crucial that shelter protocols specify how to determine that an animal has a particular disease, the manual notes. A false positive could lead to unnecessary treatment, isolation, a prolonged shelter stay, or, at worst, euthanasia. Meanwhile, incorrectly declaring an animal to be free of disease could cause infection to spread in the shelter “or lead to heartache, frustration, and even lawsuits from the unpleasantly surprised adopter,” the authors note. The manual offers advice for recognizing diseases, managing population risk, and charting a course for individual treatment.

To purchase copies of *Maddie’s Infection Control Manual for Animal Shelters* for \$30 each plus shipping cost, go to cfsph.iastate.edu and click on “Products” or call 515-294-7189; fax 515-294-8259; or e-mail cfsph@iastate.edu. AS

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States is about animal tracking software for animal care and control agencies, shelters, and rescues. What’s out there? What does it do? How much does it cost?

We recently conducted a survey of a long list of software providers and asked them some of those questions. Their answers are now available online at animalsheltering.org/sheltersoftware, so if your organization is geeking out (or freaking out!), stop by and check out the survey results.

Just keep in mind that the survey answers are self-reported by the companies and have not been fact-checked by any third party. We recommend talking directly with company representatives for details before choosing a software program for your organization! AS