



*Frequently Asked Questions by Pet
Owners about*

The Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR)

The following FAQs provide simplified explanations and answers about the VCPR. For a complete definition of the VCPR, read the [VCPR section of the Principles of Veterinary Medical Ethics](#).

Q. What is a Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR)?

A: A Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship, or VCPR for short, exists when your veterinarian knows your pet well enough to be able to diagnose and treat any medical conditions your animal develops. Your part of the VCPR is allowing your veterinarian to take responsibility for making clinical judgments about your pet's health, asking questions to make sure you understand, and following your veterinarian's instructions. Your veterinarian's part of the VCPR involves making those judgments, accepting the responsibility for providing your pet with medical care, advising you about the benefits and risks of different treatment options, keeping a written record of your pet's medical care, and helping you know how to get emergency care for your pet if the need should arise.

Q: How is a VCPR established and maintained?

A: A VCPR is established only when your veterinarian examines your animal in person, and is maintained by regular veterinary visits as needed to monitor your animal's health. If a VCPR is established but your veterinarian does not regularly see your pet afterward, the VCPR is no longer valid and it would be illegal and unethical for your veterinarian to dispense or prescribe medications or recommend treatment without recently examining your pet. A valid VCPR cannot be established online, via email, or over the phone.

Q. Why is a VCPR so important?

A: For one, it's required by law – in order for a veterinarian to diagnose or treat your animal, or prescribe or dispense medications, a VCPR must be in effect. Two, it's the best thing for your animal's health. Your veterinarian should be familiar with your animal's medical history and keep a written record of your animal's health so they can provide your animal with the best possible care.

Q: How can a VCPR be ended?

A: You, as the client, can terminate a VCPR at any time by notifying the veterinarian. If your veterinarian chooses to end the VCPR, they should notify you and, if your animal has an ongoing illness, provide medical care until you have transitioned to another veterinarian.

This information has been prepared as a service by the American Veterinary Medical Association. Redistribution is acceptable, but the document's original content and format must be maintained, and its source must be prominently identified. Please contact Dr. Kimberly May (800.248.2862, ext 6667; kmay@avma.org) with questions or comments.

Q. What does my veterinarian offer that an online source can't match?

A: Your veterinarian knows you and knows your animal(s), and this is critical to keeping your animal(s) healthy. For example, your veterinarian can customize a vaccination program to give your animal the best protection from disease and make sure that it isn't getting a vaccine it doesn't need. Vaccine and drug reactions, although uncommon, can occur, and your veterinarian is trained to recognize and treat them to minimize the chance that the reaction will become severe or even life-threatening – you can't get that from a website!

Figuring out what's wrong with an animal is like solving a very complex puzzle - your veterinarian has to figure out how to fit all of the clues (pieces of the puzzle) together to solve it. Veterinarians have, on average, 8 or more years of college and in-depth veterinary school training to prepare them for this task. Their training makes it possible for them to thoroughly evaluate, diagnose and treat your animal's problem. Doing these things effectively involves thorough knowledge of your animal's body systems and how they function, as well as a familiarity with how medications and other treatments work and if any treatments interfere with others. Hands-on physical examination is incredibly valuable to your pet and can't be replaced by a phone conversation, web-based conversation, or email description.