Dog Capture and Handling

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Key points
- Target roaming / outdoor dogs and puppies as a priority
- Catching a dog requires coordination between team members
- Once the dog is restrained, vaccinate quickly
- If a dog cannot be easily handled by its owner, catch it in a net
- In most countries stray/roaming dogs are rarely dangerous if handled correctly

Training: Dog capture and handling
Please contact World Animal Protection for assistance with finding trainers for dog capture and handling.

Risks and precautions
- Avoid getting bitten!
- All staff involved in mass vaccination of dogs should have completed the full course of pre-exposure vaccinations.
- Anyone bitten or scratched should wash the wound immediately under running water for 1.5 minutes with soap, then disinfect with ethanol (700ml/l) or iodine [tincture or aqueous solution] if available, and immediately go to the nearest approved hospital or bite treatment centre for an assessment of whether postexposure rabies vaccination is needed – this includes dog owners assisting staff with vaccination and staff that have been previously vaccinated.
- Vaccination team members should not attempt to capture a dog without training.
- If dogs are observed to show potential signs of rabies refer to the guides Euthanasia of Rabid or Suspect Rabid Dogs and Rapid Response to Rabid and Suspect Rabid Dog Alerts.

Related guides
Euthanasia of Rabid or Suspect Rabid Dogs
Rapid Response to Suspect Rabid Dog Alerts
1. Personnel & training

**Personnel**

**Vaccination team:** Including at least 2 to 4 dog catchers. See the guide *Preparation for Vaccination.*

The role of dog catcher is best suited to people with some dog handling experience or who, once trained are available for future Mass Dog Vaccination rounds.

**Community liaison Officer (CLO):** It is recommended that this person should be friendly in nature, have very good communication skills, and if known locally, be well respected. They should also have a good knowledge of the location and local administration.

**Training**

It is essential to the success of the program that staff receive dog capture and handling training prior to the program.

**Dog handlers should be able to:**

- Explain details of the MDV program and rabies to community members (including why culling is inhumane and ineffective)
- Recognise and understand basic dog behaviour and translate different behaviours into the appropriate catching methods
- Advise owners/carers on handling dogs for vaccination
- Lift a large (docile) dog
- Hold a large dog on the ground
- Carry a small dog / puppy
- Catch a dog safely and humanely using a net
- Safely and humanely catch a loose dog using a slip lead or control-pole
- Safely muzzle a dog
- Safely use a lead as a muzzle

**Protective clothing**

All operators handling dogs should cover all exposed skin, with a minimum of closed shoes, long pants and shirt to minimise the chance of injury from a random dog bite. Gloves can make handling difficult, but once an animal is sedated or anaesthetised double layered, thinner, disposable gloves can be used. A person with wounds on their hands or arms should not handle any dogs. (Note: Animals infected with rabies can shed virus in their saliva for up to 10 days before rabies is identified [OIE, 2013].)

Note: When handling suspect rabid dogs additional precautions need to be taken. See the guide *Rapid Response to Suspect Rabid Dog Alerts.*
2. Dog capture

2.1 Understanding dog behaviour *(Courtesy of FAO, Indonesia)*
When attempting to capture a dog, it is important to understand how a dog is likely to react.

**A dog’s radar:** Dogs use their eyes, ears and nose to collect information about their surroundings. The 360º area around the dog in which it responds to stimuli can be called its radar (like an invisible bubble). The radar is strongest at the front of the dog and weakest at the back. Understanding a dog’s radar is essential to catching dogs.

- Roaming dogs have a large radar so they are more likely to run away if approached.
- Dogs that are used to people have a smaller radar so can be approached more closely.
- If a dog feels threatened it has two instinctive responses; ‘fight’ *(becomes aggressive)* or ‘flight’ *(runs away)*. The purpose of both is to try to distance itself from the threat.
- A dog will move between being curious and afraid. When a dog is afraid, it will often run to where it is comfortable (i.e. its home). By understanding this the catcher can anticipate its movements. A curious dog that doesn’t feel threatened will have a relatively small radar, and the size of the radar will get bigger as the dog becomes more nervous.
- If a dog is approached at its front, it will back away in the opposite direction. If two people approach the dog, then the dog will take the safest path of retreat by moving in a direction that splits the difference between the two.

*In most countries stray/roaming dogs are rarely dangerous if handled correctly* (but it should be remembered that they are not used to being handled by humans, often only being given food by them).

2.2 Involving the community and dog owners
The CLO should communicate to the community the reason for the dog capture. Involving the community in the capture is also highly recommended as local people are aware of the location of the dogs they feed, and can advise on what might be the best bait and which are friendly and unfriendly dogs. The CLO can gather this information for the locations in advance of capture.

*Ask the owner to assist*

The fastest and safest option is for any owners to assist with catching and holding their dog. Therefore, firstly, ask the owners if they are happy to hold their dog – this should be their choice. If they are willing, the dog catcher can then direct the owner on the correct way to hold the dog for vaccination *(see ‘Dog Handling’)*. However for roaming, or un-owned dogs follow the following guidelines on ‘Catching by Hand’ and ‘Dog Capture using Equipment’.

2.3 Catching by hand
Catching a dog by hand is possible for friendly dogs – this should not be tried for aggressive or suspect Rabid dogs. It is the least invasive and least stressful method of capture and should always be used where possible. Handlers should handle the dog gently – if it feels pain, it could bite.
Approaching an animal
The following is a general guide for attempting to catch a dog by hand:

1. Stand back and discretely observe the dog, trying to read whether it is likely to run or stand its ground.

2. Avoid eye contact - if you are not staring at them, dogs will assume you are not interested in them and feel safe.

3. Keep your body posture unthreatening: let your body relax, shoulders droop, and avoid threatening gestures such as a raised arm etc. As you get closer you can reduce your size and threat by crouching down.


5. Move slowly and avoid a direct approach by making small sideways steps.

6. Entice using food – an animal approaching you calmly will be easy to slip a leash on or use a net (See 'Dog Capture using Equipment').

7. If you see any unwanted reaction by the dog, STOP and reassess the situation. Try to predict where and when it might run - can you direct the dog into an enclosed area? Consider if it is time to use a net.

8. If the dog runs, do not chase it but watch where it is going.

9. When the dog is caught, attempt to restrain the dog with a slip leash and use a muzzle if required.

Key points: Approaching an animal
- Before approaching assess the situation
- Observe the dog without eye contact
- Remain calm
- Do not walk directly to the dog
- Stop when the dog becomes agitated
- Snoop down, lower your body posture
- Entice dog with food
- DO NOT CHASE if the dog takes flight
- Do not provoke the dog to run away
- If in doubt use a net

2.4 Dog capture using equipment
If the dog cannot be held by an owner or caught by hand by the vaccination team then you will need to use capture equipment such as a net or slip leash.

Capture is always stressful for the animal so any person involved must attempt to minimise this stress.
Using baits: Baits (such as bread or meat) can be used to distract the dog’s attention from the catchers. While one catcher attracts the dog with bait, the other catcher can come behind the dog and catch it.

Catching dogs in confined areas
- At least three dog catchers are needed for this method. All catchers should observe the alertness of the dog.
- One walks alongside and past the dog. When the dog is looking at them, the other two catchers remaining on the other side of the dog, approach and catch the dog (either by hand or using a net or other equipment – See ‘Equipment’).
- If the dog is in a passage, one catcher can direct the dog in the direction of the other two. Those two catchers should stay one behind the other albeit to the side. Then if the first one misses the dog the other should be able to catch it.

Catching dogs in an open area — Using nets (Courtesy of FAO, Indonesia)
Catching a dog in an open area using a net requires a coordinated team of at least 4 people. (Note: If the dog is alert and running around, consider looking for another opportunity to catch the dog in a different location). This method is also effective for a dog hiding in a room or in a house.

Key points: Catching dogs using nets
- Plan before you begin
- Use team work with one coordinator, and one provocateur
- First check that there are no surprise exits. If the dog has an owner, ask them where it is likely to run
- Do not allow the dog to run onto a busy road
- Work quickly and silently or the dog will become suspicious and may panic – you will only have one chance
- Do not place the net over a running dog—always allow the dog to run into the net

Sneaking up on a dog (Calm, curious, sleeping dogs)
- A dog can be netted if you can sneak up while it is asleep or distracted by something in front of it as dogs have good front and peripheral vision, but cannot see directly behind them. Noise, such as barking, will stop the dog hearing what is behind.
- Distraction can be food, another caught dog, female dog on heat, calling the dog. Note that this only works if the dog is curious and calm.
- One person on the team should be responsible for trying to attract the dog’s attention from the front (diversion) while those with nets approach quietly from behind. Usually only one net is needed.
  - **Surprise:** This strategy uses surprise. Keep the dog focussed on one person (i.e. with the food or by looking interesting) while another person walks quietly and catches it from behind. It is important that the “distractor” looks only at the dog and not at the person with the net. He should use hand signals to tell the catcher that the dog is focused and it is time to catch it.
  - **Sleeping dogs:** Many dogs sleep in the middle of the day and by keeping silent and moving fast, it is possible to catch sleepy dogs.
• **Two for one**: You may find that you can catch other dogs when they come to investigate the caught dog. This is very effective.

• **Using a motorbike**: It is much easier to get close to a dog on a motor bike than on foot. The person behind should hold the net while the other drives the motorbike. The team approach the dog without looking at it. As soon as they arrive alongside the dog the driver slows down and stops while keeping the engine running. At exactly the same time, the person with the net steps off the bike and catches the dog before it realizes that something is happening. The team must move fast and not hesitate.

**Using an exit pathway (Wild, aggressive and scared dogs)**

1. It is important to plan ahead to determine where the dog will run. There should only be one exit path available to the dog – block off any alternative exits.
2. Two dog catchers should be placed along the escape route, hiding behind solid objects, such as a house. They need to be in staggered formation so that they do not hit each other with the nets, and if the first person misses the dog the next one can catch it.
3. Another team member (the provocateur) then shepherds the dog through the exit.
4. Always allow the dog to run into the net by placing the net in front of the dog. (Note: Do not try to place the net over a running dog as the dog can easily escape and then it becomes very difficult to catch that dog again.)
5. Once the dog is in the net, twist it to trap the dog tightly in the end of the net.

**Calming dogs once caught**

Dogs can scream out of fear after being caught so it is important to calm the dog. Try covering their eyes (which typically calms them) and pet the dog but be careful not to get bitten through the net (remember the dog is threatened and could fight).

**Fitting collars through nets**

If dogs are caught using a net, it is possible to fit them with a collar using clamps. For a guide see Dog Collar Video (FAO, 2014). Also, see the guide Vaccination Day.
3. Dog Handling

Small and Medium Dogs
If you have a raised table, you can lift all small and medium dogs onto this. However, it is often difficult to find a raised surface for vaccinations in the field. For small dogs, the best method is for the owner or operator to pick the dog up for vaccination [see below], being careful to support the weight of the dog properly. The person holding the dog should be aware of where the dog’s mouth is so they can avoid being bitten.

- Dog feels safe and secure in owner’s arms
- Dog cannot get traction to move
- Neck or rear is exposed for injection
- Dog cannot turn to bite vaccinator

![Calm, small dog.](Source: World Animal Protection)

![Restrain head for more flighty dogs.](Source: World Animal Protection)

Large Dogs

Recommended

Large dogs and dogs that don’t like to be carried can stay on the ground/floor.

Pull the dog against body and hold head firmly but not restrictively – be aware of where the mouth is and hold by the scuff of neck or by the muzzle if needed.

In this way,
- Dogs are made to feel secure
- Neck and rear is exposed
- Dog is mostly unaware of the vaccinator
- Dogs cannot turn and bite if held properly
Alternatives

Straddling the dog:

- Can be used with problem dogs
- Can hold dog by head or shoulders

Note: Vaccination site can be obscured by person’s leg.
Standing in front of the dog and holding them by the neck:
- Commonly used in some areas
- Can calm the dog as dogs can see person
- holding them.

![Image](Source: WSPA, n.d.)

## 4. Equipment

The equipment outlined here has been found to be effective and humane.

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<th>Use</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
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<td>Collars</td>
<td>Marking vaccinated adult dogs</td>
<td>For a guide to fitting a collar see <a href="https://www.fao.org/3/a-i5918e.pdf">Dog Collar Video</a> (FAO, 2014).</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(Image source: FAO, 2014)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clamps</td>
<td>For fitting collars through nets</td>
<td>For a guide to fitting a collar using a surgical clamp, see <a href="https://www.fao.org/3/a-i5918e.pdf">Dog Collar Video</a> (FAO, 2014).</td>
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| **Leash** | Essential Use as lead and/or muzzle. | To use a leash as a muzzle, wrap it around the dog’s muzzle once or twice while holding leash with the other hand at the neck. Bring around the back of neck and hold firmly.  
(Source: WSPA, n.d.) |
| **Slip leads** | For calm tempered dogs: Made into a running noose that can be slipped around dog’s neck and used to restrain the dog. | Simply made from rope or cord about 10mm in diameter with an ‘O’ ring at the end. |
| **Throw nets** | Medium, small dogs | Net usually about 2x2m with a weighted rim cord to help with throwing. Once netted, dogs must be carefully released and restrained with control-pole or slip leash. |
| **Pole nets** | Useful for capturing dogs that are not used to being held by people. The hoop is placed over the front end of the dog and the dog moves to the end of the net, or allow the dog to run in to the net. The pole is lifted and the net twisted several times until the dog is restrained/not able to move. | ![Diagram](image_url) |
| Control pole/Graspers | Aggressive & difficult dogs, temperament unknown: Adjustable noose/pincers on end of a pole | Weight of the whole net - 3 kg (lighter and stronger is better)
Circular frame - Made of aluminium is ideal as it is strong and light.
Handle - Made of aluminium - must be strong. Handle should be removable from the ring.
Net - Nylon net used for fishing with a minimum depth of 4ft. Eye size of the net is 1” x 1”. The net should be made of very strong fishing line as dogs are very good at tearing/biting through and escaping. (Source: Samarasinghe, 2009)

| Purchased or homemade. Training is necessary as they can be harmful to a dog if used incorrectly.  
To make: Use a hollow metal tube 1-2m long, 3 cms diameter. Take a length of rope or plastic covered steel cable, double it and feed loop through the tube until it appears at the far end. Tie off the loose ends to prevent them being pulled through the tube.  
To use: Slip adjustable loop over the dog’s head and around its neck. Then use the pole to keep the dog at arms’ length and move to a secure area. Make sure you do not strangle the dog (if the breath is raspy or tongue appears blue, slacken off immediately).  
(Source: World Animal Protection) |
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<tr>
<th><strong>Muzzles</strong></th>
<th>To prevent a dog from biting other dogs or people.</th>
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If a commercial muzzle is not available, one can be made using cotton gauze.

1. First form a loop from an overhand knot that is big enough to pass over the dog’s muzzle.
2. Holding the ends of the tape in both hands, with the knot side up, slip the loop over the dog’s muzzle and pass up approximately halfway to the corner of the dog’s mouth, then tighten.
3. The ends pass under the dog’s chin.
4. Some staff may then form another overhand knot under the chin.
5. The ends are then brought around either side of the dog’s neck and finally tied off at the back with a bow for quick release.

(RSPCA International, 2009)

(Image source: World Animal Protection)
Additional resources


References


