



RED FLAGS OF ANIMAL ABUSE

The following red flags may raise the level of suspicion that abuse is occurring, and warrant further inquiry or reporting to the proper authorities. However, none of these alone constitutes proof of abuse.

small animal

History & Client Interaction

- The medical history is vague, changes during the visit, and/or differs between family members.
- The history does not reasonably match what you see on the physical exam (e.g., a fall from the bed causing multiple fractures in the rear limbs).
- Displaced priorities that seem to avoid the primary concern (e.g., asking about tick prevention when discussing treatment for a fracture).
- Clients who say their pets are “accident-prone” (e.g., multiple accidental injuries to the same or multiple pets).
- Refusal of pain medication and/or basic care.
- Delayed treatment.
- Frequent turnover of pets, which may come and go without much explanation.
- Known or suspected family and/or partner (domestic) violence.
- Owner admits to injuring the animal.
- Owner brings many animals in, typically when they are in crisis or with conditions seen in high-density settings (URI, KC, FeLV, diarrhea). The pet or client may smell of old urine or excrement.
 - These may be indicators of hoarding (large numbers of animals beyond capacity to provide basic care).

Evaluation & Diagnostics

- Chronic, untreated medical problems (e.g., external parasites, wounds, tumors, matting).
- New injuries that present with older injuries in various stages of healing.
- Evidence of multiple healed wounds, scars, fractures, etc.
- Poor body condition, weakness, chronic lameness.
- Injuries localized to the head, bilateral rib fractures.
 - Note: HBC tends to cause skin abrasions/deglowing, pulmonary contusions, pneumothorax, hind limb injuries, unilateral rib fractures.
- Animal may seem fearful of the owner and/or relieved when away from the owner.



during the exam...

- Ask open-ended questions.
 - Tell me how he/she was injured.
 - Can you describe what happened?
 - What do you think caused the injury?
- Question the narrative from several angles and document both consistent and inconsistent responses.
- If children and other members of the family are present, ask them if they have anything to add about how the injuries occurred.
 - Understand other family members may be at risk if they give a different history.
- If able, ask these questions individually in private.
 - If not possible, let them know they can contact you at a later time.
- Ask about other pets in the house (e.g., how many pets are in the home) and compare to existing records.

dogfighting

History & Client Interactions

- Pays for services in cash.
- Boasts of veterinary medical knowledge and/or states they self-vaccinate dogs.
- Requests wound care medicines and/or antibiotics.
- Evades questions and/or is reluctant to provide specific details.
- Behavior may be passive.
- Owns several pit bull terriers.

Evaluation & Diagnostics

Appearance

- Possibly cropped ears.
- Blunt, broken, or missing teeth.
- Dogs may be thin (BCS 3-4/9) yet well muscled.
- Pit bull terrier breed, typically smaller and agile.
- Heavy leather or logging chain collar.

Common Injuries

- Significant wounds and/or scarring to front legs, torso, neck, face, and ears.
- Wounds are typically puncture wounds or “ring lesions” (*circumscribing wounds typically seen on the limbs*).
- Wounds and/or fractures in various stages of healing, indicating dog may have been fought more than once.
- Abrasions on paw pads.

Other Signs

- Animal may test positive for Babesiosis
- Animal’s behavior may be aggressive while the human is passive.



cockfighting

History & Client Interactions

- Pays for services in cash.
- Has customized wood transport box.
- Boasts of veterinary medical knowledge.
- Requests testosterone or other performance-enhancing substances/stimulants.
- Evades questions and/or is reluctant to provide specific details.
- May have a disproportionate number of roosters with few to no hens.

Environment & Assessment

- Certain feathers (tail feathers, wing primaries, back, ventral feathers) are trimmed or removed.
- Wounds and/or scarring consistent with slashing (knives) or puncture (gaffs). Primarily located on the head.
- Combs and wattles and ear lobes removed.
- Natural spur removed, cut down, or sharpened.