

Shelter Medicine Practice RVS Exam Study Guide – 2026

This guide will help you prepare for your ABVP Recognized Veterinary Specialty (RVS) examination this November. The 350 item Combined RVS Exam is given in two parts on the same day. The exams are mostly to exclusively multiple-choice type items. There is the possibility of fill in the blank, short answer, essay, or matching for some exam items.

The AVMA best practice is that the examination items align with a Job Task Analysis (JTA) of current RVS Diplomates. Shelter Medicine Practice utilized subject matter experts to develop the JTA. Additionally, it has been decided that some exam items can come from current journals and a small percentage can be at your Exam Committee’s discretion. Please note that items drawn from current journals (with a 5 year look back period) are 1) from a journal on the RVS Reading List, 2) the question is drawn from the abstract only, and 3) the journal abstract must be freely available. The exception to this is Veterinary Clinics of North America (if applicable), where the exam taker is responsible for the whole article.

Exam Blueprint

Domain	Percentage of Exam	Subdomains (Percentage of Domain)
Physical Health of Animal	29%	Infectious Disease/Outbreaks (12%) Sanitation and Biosecurity (12%) Surgery and Anesthesia (12%) Vaccination (12%) Facility/Environment (11%) Euthanasia (11%) Medical (Non-Infectious) (10%) Nutrition and Husbandry (10%) Parasites (10%)
Shelter Management	18%	Population Management (14%) Animal ID, Tracking, Intake/Outcome Stats and Analysis (12%) Management and Leadership (12%) Record Keeping (12%) Data and Analysis (11%) Regulatory (11%) Mental Health, Resiliency and Self-Care (11%) Resource Allocation, Funding, Grants (9%) Liability (8%)
Behavioral Health	16%	QOL and Needs Assessment (14%) Animal Handling (13%) Assessment and Decision Making (13%) Body Language (13%) Common Behavior Problems (13%) Stress (13%) Facility/Environment (12%)



		Learning Theory (9%)
Companion Animal Homelessness	12%	Spay-Neuter (16%) Shelter Diversion Programs (14%) Adoption and Placement (13%) Epidemiology of Homelessness and At-Risk Populations (13%) Transfer Programs (13%) Disaster (12%) Reunification (12%) Non-Surgical Sterilization (7%)
Community and Public Health	11%	Animal Cruelty (21%) Zoonotic Disease (21%) Animals and Public Safety (20%) Rabies (20%) Reportable and Emerging Disease (18%)
Animals and Public Policy	7%	Ethics (28%) Regulatory (27%) Legislation (25%) Animal Shelter History (20%)
Research and Biostats	6%	Epidemiology and Biostats (54%) Study Design (46%)

Study Material

Core Material

These references are foundational sources for SMP examination items and should be studied in their entirety. Items will be drawn from the most recent editions/versions.

- ASV Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters
- ASV Veterinary Medical Care Guidelines for Spay-Neuter Programs
- Merck MD. Veterinary Forensics: Animal Cruelty Investigations
- Miller L, Zawistowski S. Shelter Medicine for Veterinarians and Staff
- Miller L, Hurley K., Janeczko J. Infectious Disease Management in Animal Shelters
- Scarlett J, Greenberg M, Hoshizaki T. Every Nose Counts: Using Metrics in Animal Shelters
- DiGangi B, Cussen V, Reid P, Collins K. Animal Behavior for Shelter Veterinarians and Staff
- White S. High-Quality, High-Volume Spay and Neuter and Other Shelter Surgeries

- Medicine and Surgery
 - AAFP Guidelines with focus on:
 - Vaccination (2020 version)
 - Retrovirus Management
 - AAHA Guidelines with focus on:
 - Anesthesia and Monitoring Guidelines



- Canine Vaccination
- Community Care Guidelines
- AAFP/AAHA Antimicrobial Stewardship Guidelines
- American Heartworm Society Guidelines for the Diagnosis, Prevention, and Management of Heartworm Infection in Dogs and Cats
- AHS/ASV Minimizing Heartworm Transmission in Relocated Dogs

Journals

These journals frequently contain content important to specialty level, evidence-based shelter medicine knowledge. Items will be drawn from article abstracts published within the 5 years prior to the exam and will reflect **knowledge important to shelter medicine practice**. For the 2026 exam, journal articles from 2025, 2024, 2023, 2022, and 2021 may be included.

Core Journal: Journal of Shelter Medicine and Community Animal Health

- Animal Welfare
- Animals
- Anthrozoos
- Applied Animal Behavior Science
- Emerging Infectious Diseases
- Forensic Science International: Reports
- Frontiers in Veterinary Science
- JAVMA
- Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science
- Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery
- Journal of Forensic Sciences
- Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Applications and Research
- Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine
- Journal of Veterinary Medical Education
- PLoS One
- Preventive Veterinary Medicine
- Veterinary Dermatology
- The Veterinary Journal
- Veterinary Microbiology
- Veterinary Parasitology
- Veterinary Pathology
- Veterinary Record
- Zoonosis and Public Health



Supplemental Material

These references provide in depth information to supplement the core materials listed above. Items drawn from these sources would reflect knowledge that is key to specialty level shelter medicine practice. Examinees are encouraged to review relevant information to enhance knowledge as needed.

Items are drawn from the most recent editions/versions unless otherwise noted.

Trainings, Manuals and Guidelines (available online)

Medicine and Surgery

- AAFP Guidelines (in addition to those listed under Core Material with focus on):
 - Zoonoses
 - Anesthesia
- AAHA Guidelines (in addition to those listed under Core Material with focus on):
 - Fluid Therapy Guidelines
 - Pain Management Guidelines
- ACVIM Antimicrobial use Guidelines for Treatment of Respiratory Tract Disease in Dogs and Cats

Shelter Operations

- The Asilomar Accords
- ASV Position Statements and Information Documents
- AVMA/ASV Non-Emergency Relocation of Dogs and Cats for Adoption within the United States
- AVMA Microchipping of Animals FAQ

Public Health

- NASPHV Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control

Euthanasia

- AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals
- AVMA Guidelines for the Depopulation of Animals
- HSUS Euthanasia Reference Manual

Behavior

- AAHA Canine and Feline Behavior Management Guidelines
- Fear Free Shelter Program

Disaster Response

- FEMA online courses
 - IS-100.C: Introduction to Incident Command System
 - IS-200.C: Basic Incident Command System for Initial Response
 - IS-700.B: National Incident Management System (NIMS) An Introduction
 - IS-10.A: Animals in Disasters: Awareness and Preparedness
 - IS-11.A: Animals in Disasters: Community Planning



- NASAAEP Best Practice Working Groups resources

Textbooks

General Medicine and Surgery

- Bonagura J, Twedt D. Kirk's Current Veterinary Therapy XIV
- Booth D. Small Animal Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics
- Cote LA, Cote E. Cote's Clinical Veterinary Advisor: Dogs and Cats
- Fossum T. Small Animal Surgery
- Grimm KA, Lamont LA, Tranquilli WJ, Greene SA, Robertson SA. Veterinary Anesthesia and Analgesia
- Hall J. Guyton & Hall Textbook of Medical Physiology
- Little S. The Cat: Clinical Medicine and Management
- Morgan R. Handbook of Small Animal Practice
- Muir W, Hubbell J. Handbook of Veterinary Anesthesia

Behavior

- Landsberg G, Hunthausen W, Ackerman L. Behavior Problems of the Dog and Cat
- Yin S. Low Stress Handling, Restraint, and Behavior Modification of Dogs & Cats

Infectious Disease

- Greene C. Infectious Diseases of the Dog and Cat
- Bowman D. Georgis' Parasitology for Veterinarians

Epidemiology and Statistics

- Thrusfield M. Veterinary Epidemiology
- Smith R. Veterinary Clinical Epidemiology

Small Mammals

- Quesenberry K, Mans C, Orcutt C, Carpenter J. Ferrets, Rabbits, and Rodents

Management/Leadership

- Renz DO, Herman RD. The Jossey-Bass Handbook of Nonprofit Leadership and Management
- O'Neal-McElrath T. Winning Grants Step by Step: The Complete Workbook for Planning, Developing and Writing Successful Proposals

