The Iditarod Trail Committee exists to preserve the tradition of dog mushing in Alaska by staging the world premier sled dog race along the Iditarod Trail

IDITAROD RETURN DOG MANUAL

2027

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INTRODUCTION AND MANUAL INSTRUCTIONS

This manual is designed as a reference to the functions and protocols of the Iditarod Return Dog Program.

Return Dogs are those that are discontinued from race participation for a multitude of possible reasons, including estrus, lack of speed, musher strategy, immaturity, attitude, fatigue, illness, or injury. The Return Dog Program addresses the needs of those dogs pending return to their home kennels.

The Return Dog Program's Mission is:

> To provide the best medical care, shelter, and transport of Return Dogs from time of separation from their dog team to their "home kennel"

All MUST read SECTION 1- General Overview as this includes the main set-up and summary points of the Program and handler protocols for handling/feeding/housing/caring for the dogs. Missing this section and skipping to later sections will make your knowledge incomplete!!!

Duties that are particular for a certain position in Return Dog are then broken down further by section (Veterinarian, Handler, Musher). Veterinary Technicians should read both the Veterinarian and Handler section of their assigned Return Dog location as they need to assist both Veterinarian and Handlers alike.

These location-specific sections make sense AFTER reading Section 1.

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SECTION 1: GENERAL OVERVIEW OF RETURN DOG PROGRAM FOR ALL

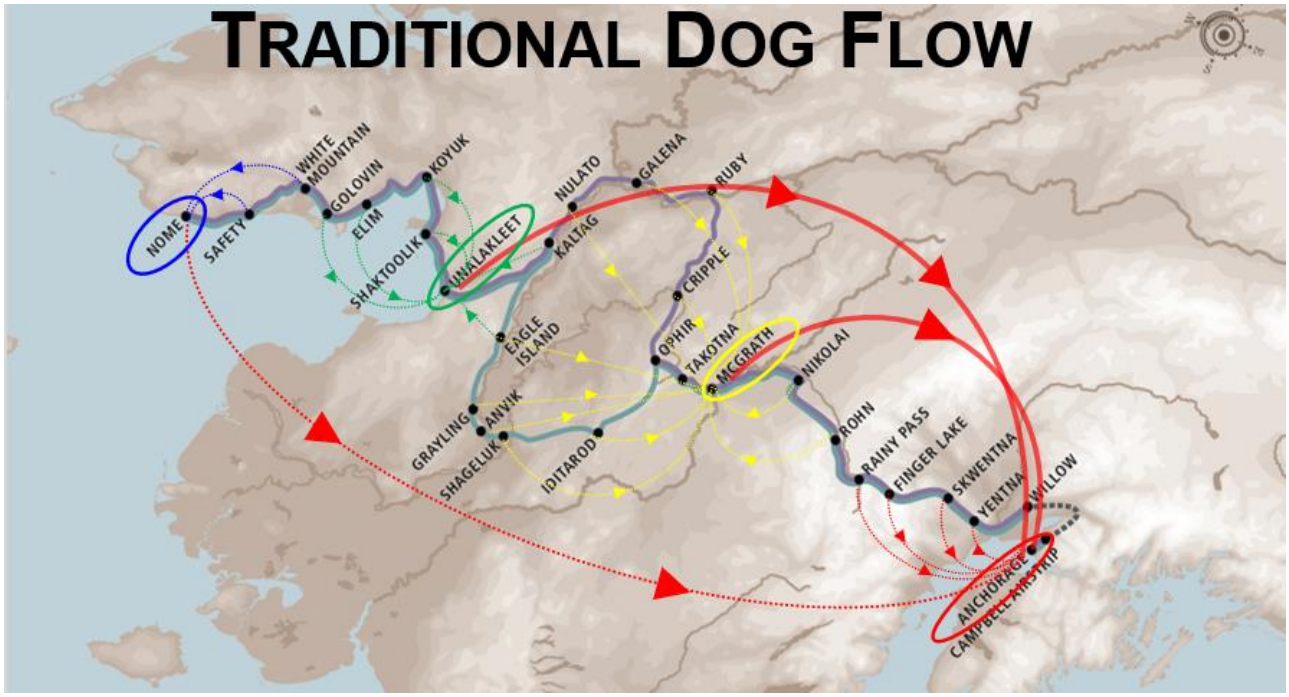
This overview gives main details of the program structure and function as well as specific topics of:

1. **RETURN DOG FLOW**
2. **DOG TRANSPORTATION**
3. **RETURN DOG PROGRAM LEADERSHIP**
4. **DOG CARE AGREEMENT**
5. ***16-POINT GENERAL SUMMARY***
6. **WALKING RETURN DOGS DETAILS**
7. **FEEDING RETURN DOGS DETAILS**
8. **LOOSE DOG PROACTIVE AND REACTIVE PROTOCOLS**

This program has two components which are of equal importance and must be closely coordinated. For purposes of discussion, the two components are transportation and husbandry (logistics) and medicine (medical). Iditarod is unique compared to many races, particularly as the race is not accessible via any route other than snow machine or plane. This makes it impossible to have the Musher's Dog truck follow along, and take any dogs discontinued from the race into their care. That is why the Return Dog Program is so robust and needed. Return dogs that are discontinued from their team are medically cared for and transported by the Iditarod Veterinary Team and ITC respectively, ultimately reuniting them with their Mushers after the race. The Return Dog Program is Headquartered in Anchorage.

RETURN DOG FLOW

As depicted in below figure, Return Dogs are flown from their discontinued checkpoint, to their closest Hub- Anchorage, McGrath, Unalakleet, or Nome. Other than Nome, dogs are then brought from the trail hubs of McGrath and Unalakleet to Anchorage for final medical clearance and release.



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RETURN DOG TRANSPORTATION

Return Dog travelling from remote checkpoints to their local hub will be transported by the Iditarod Airforce, a group of volunteer pilots and their planes. These are often Cessnas and Pipers. Once at the Trail hubs, they will be cared for by dedicated Return Dog Team before being transported in bulk via cargo (unless medical issue necessitates commercial travel with a veterinarian or Return Dog team member) to Anchorage. In Anchorage, they will receive final examinations and be medically cleared and released.

It can take several days for a dog who is returned as a remote checkpoint far down trail to make it back to Anchorage. Therefore, the Trail hubs of McGrath, Unalakleet, and Nome have a dedicated Return Dog Team to care for them. This is also true for Anchorage, however Anchorage has enhanced ability and extensive logistics, therefore more team members.

In review of this logistical and medical need, this Program has dedicated Leadership to keep all parts moving smoothly.

RETURN DOG PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

In general, the transportation and husbandry have oversight from the Race Director's role, and medical topics are under the direction of the Chief Veterinarian. Both the Race Director and Chief Veterinarian are often on the trail during the race, therefore a Return Dog Coordinator manages the transportation/husbandry (logistics) for Return Dogs, and the Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical Care directs the medical treatment of Return Dogs. Those two roles work in sync with the medical need and dog safety as priority at all times.

The Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical Care is based in Anchorage and is responsible for the selection of Return Dog Veterinarians and the continual assessment and overview of the medical needs of the Return Dog Program, which also includes Veterinary Technicians. This responsibility encompasses Return Dog medical needs from the time that they are discontinued from race participation until they are either safely under the supervision of their own handlers/Musher or in the appropriate medical facility if needed. Return Dog Veterinarians are selected to staff Anchorage, McGrath, Unalakleet, and Nome. The Veterinarians direct the health care of Return Dogs in their respective locations and are in constant communication with the Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical Care. A lead trail Veterinary Technician will work under the Veterinarian in Charge of the Return Dog Medical Care to staff the Return Dog locations with technicians to assist in dog care.

Trail Hub Return Dog Veterinarians will be in communication with Trail Veterinarians in the smaller checkpoints as well regarding dogs that will be coming to them first on their route to Anchorage. The Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical Care will oversee these communications and any concerns that may develop as well.

Any logistical needs and concerns are communicated by the Return Dog team to the Return Dog

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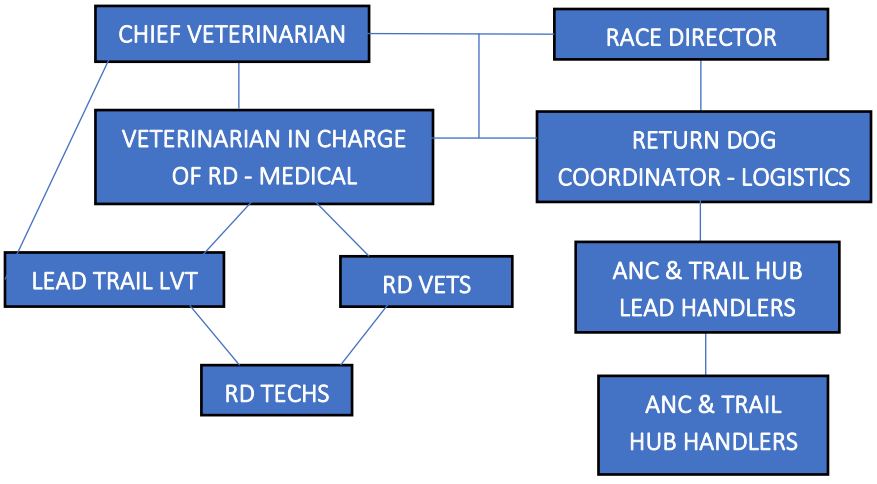
Coordinator. Having the Return Dog Coordinator and Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical stationed in Anchorage together is vital in this seamless communication.

The Return Dog Coordinator is based in Anchorage and is responsible for assisting the Race Logistics Team in ensuring dogs at remote checkpoints are brought to the Trail hubs. Once in the hubs, the Return Dog Coordinator is responsible for their transportation back to Anchorage. The Return Dog Coordinator is also responsible for the handler volunteers assigned to each Return Dog Location to provide 24-hour husbandry needs of the dogs (housing and feeding) until they return home. All the gear needed to care for the Return dogs including but not limited to droplines, necklines, food and bedding, is managed by the Return Dog Coordinator.

The Return Dog Coordinator appoints lead handlers to assist in the trail hub locations' logistical coordination. All Return Dog locations have several general lay-handlers that support the program and are overseen by their Lead Handler. All Handlers needed to support this program are recruited and work under the direction of the Return Dog Coordinator.

Continual interactions regarding the logistical and husbandry needs of Return Dogs will occur between the Hub Lead Handlers and the Return Dog Coordinator. In the event that problems may be identified that would deviate from normal protocol for the logistical needs, the Return Dog Coordinator will convene with the Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical Care.

Having both the Veterinarian in Charge or Return Dog Medical and Return Dog Coordinator stationed in Anchorage for the race is of major benefit for seamless communication. All personnel working the Return Dog Program are stationed at hubs only, not checkpoints. The roles and pictorial hierarchy of Return Dog can be seen in below figure:



DOG CARE AGREEMENT

Each musher must complete and sign a Dog Care Agreement before the race. This agreement has several parts, including the process for treating all Return while in the care of the Return Dog Program,

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as well as other support in the form of local hospitals (including a 24-hr PetER in Anchorage). This agreement allows the ITC and Chief Veterinarian to make medical decisions on behalf of the dog while the musher I racing, including passing care to a 24-hour PetER if needed. This agreement also requires the musher to designate two "Local Contacts" and a "Local Veterinary Hospital." Local Contact persons (handlers) are responsible for picking up and housing any Return Dogs that have been medically cleared in Anchorage until the dogs can be Return to their regular homes/dog yards. The designated local veterinary hospital (with whom a musher has left a monetary deposit) agrees to continue care for non-critical illness/injuries after their release from the Anchorage Return Dog Veterinarians.

16 POINT SUMMARY

This 16-point outline was developed to summarize the general protocol for the ITC handling of dogs discontinued from race participation (Return Dogs) regardless of their location:

1. **Return Dog Supplies:** The first veterinarian to arrive to a checkpoint or hub will be responsible for moving in and/or documenting the presence of Veterinary and Return Dog boxes supplies. At a checkpoint, it will be two black Plano brand "vet boxes" containing medical supplies and pharmaceuticals, and one burgundy "Return Dog Box/Tote" containing two Return Dog chains, two buckets, twenty food bowls and a feeding ladle. At a Trail hub or Anchorage, this stock will be more plentiful, in larger black vet boxes and navy blue Return Dog totes.
2. **Return Dog Designation**: A dog can be discontinued from race participation by their musher for any reason.
3. **Trail Physical Exams**: A Trail (Checkpoint) Veterinarian performs a physical exam on every Return Dog entering the Return Dog Program to assess for any abnormalities.
4. **Medical Color Status**: Each Return Dog will be assigned a color code to denote their medical status: "RED", "HIGH BLUE", "LOW BLUE", or "WHITE". A "RED" status indicates they may have a severe injury or life-threatening condition. RED-tagged dogs receive the highest priority level. "HIGH BLUE" dogs are those that need medication and close medical attention, as they can be dogs that borderline on "RED" status. "LOW BLUE" dogs are those that need medication, but they are stable. "WHITE" dogs are healthy, but they are likely tired and need some rest. However, because medical conditions may change over time and distance, all dogs are examined and monitored throughout their care in the Return Dog Program, after every flight, including their return to Anchorage, where they ultimately get final medical clearance and are released from the Iditarod.
    a. **Examples:**
        i. RED status- weak/lethargic dog with pale mucous membranes- suspected gastrointestinal (GIT) ulceration; coughing dog with increased respiratory rate and effort +/- purulent nasal discharge and lethargy- suspect pneumonia
        ii. HIGH BLUE status- coughing dog that appears relatively normal otherwise
        iii. LOW BLUE status- dog discontinued from race participation for lameness that needs analgesia
        iv. WHITE status- dog discontinued from race participation for musher strategy; dog discontinued from race participation for lameness that is no longer lame; dog in

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heat; not needing medication

When examining a dog, it is important to look at the entire animal, not just the area of the body for which the Musher deemed an issue, as their problems and status can change during their time of initial return to their release from Anchorage. Remember to perform a full exam- this includes a rectal temperature. Review Return Dog Medical Information as provided by the Chief Veterinarian.

5. **Condition Codes**: Each Return Dog will have condition codes assigned as well based on their health issue. These are broken in to 3-letter orthopedic codes and 4-letter systemic illness codes. Refer to the Return Dog Medical Notes provided by the Chief Veterinarian for more information. Both the condition code and medical color status are required for all dogs.
6. **Return Dog Forms**: Every Return Dog gets a Return Dog Form as their medical record. It is imperative that this form moves with the dog, as it contains the records of its medical status, examination, and treatment history.
    a. These forms are where the medical color status and condition code are documented. Return Dog Forms are in quadruplicate and documentation is made by a Trail Veterinarian after their initial exam is completed. Forms are updated during the dogs duration in the Return Dog program, documenting exam findings and treatments as they are made.
    b. The bottom copy of that form is left with the communications personnel at the checkpoint where the dog was discontinued to document that dog as a Return Dogs and confirm the number of dogs remaining in the team upon leaving the checkpoint (this is entered into a digital Dog Log).
    c. When the dog leaves that checkpoint, the 3rd copy remains with the veterinarians. The top two copies travel with a Return Dog back to Anchorage.
    d. Once medically processed in Anchorage, the top copy is given to the Musher's local handlers when the dog is released from our care.
    e. The last copy is for collection in Anchorage.
7. **GPS tracker units:** These are small tracker units that are placed on Return Dogs at their checkpoint of origin. The goal is for every dog to get one placed on them once in the Return Dog Program, however, if more dogs are returned at that checkpoint than anticipated, a few dogs may not get one. Each "tracker unit" consists of a numbered SPOT Trace tracker and its custom sewn nylon tracker sleeve (yellow in color and numbered), which is attached to a modified Return Dog collar (Velcro construction) separate from and behind the dog's primary racing collar. The primary function of the SPOT Trace trackers is to enhance our ability to locate loose dogs, particularly in the event that they leave the checkpoint premises.
    a. When a tracker unit is placed on a Return Dog, the tracker number must be recorded at the top of the Return Dog form which his handed to Comms shortly after their hand-off from the Musher. When writing the tracker number on a Return Dog form, MAKE SURE that the writing is LEGIBLE. Comms will then enter this number into the Dog Log and communicate that information to the Return Dog Coordinator. Return Dog Team at hubs is responsible for data entry

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8. **Transport:** The vast majority of Return Dogs are flown either directly back to Anchorage by the IAF or to trail hubs (McGrath, Unalakleet) by the IAF where they then congregate to await commercial transportation back to Anchorage. Those relatively few dogs that are discontinued from race participation in Elim (teams in the back of the pack) and White Mountain are typically flown directly to Nome by the IAF where they are reunited with their teams. Dogs Return in Safety are taken by snowmachine to Nome.
9. **Travel Stipulations**: All dogs must have coats/jackets removed and labeled prior to air travel, and Return Dogs must never be double boxed. Prior to takeoff, pilots need to be verbally informed of the need to maintain air temperatures around zero to 5 degrees F for the cargo area in which the dogs are located.
10. **Continued Dog Exams:** Dogs are re-examined by veterinarians after all flights.
11. **Housing**: Return Dogs that are of concern must be brought inside a shelter for appropriate treatment, otherwise are kept on a drop-line set up at the Return Dog location. They remain on this drop-line until transport to Anchorage.
12. **Feeding Return Dogs**: Mealtimes for Return Dogs in Return Dog Hubs are scheduled for 08:00 and 20:00 hours with snacks given at 12:00 and 16:00. Scheduled feeding times for the small checkpoints are at 08:00, 16:00 and 24:00 hours. Notations must be made on the Return Dog Form for any dog that is not eating appropriately. The differences in feeding schedules between the Hubs and the small checkpoints are primarily related to staff numbers and staff shift schedules. See detailed section on feeding dogs.
13. **Dog Log:** Lead Handlers, Veterinarians, or Veterinary Technicians at hubs, and Comms personnel at checkpoints will enter and report Return Dogs at their locations to a digital dog log, at 10:00 and 22:00 hours.
14. **Dog Monitoring**: All Return Dogs at all locations must be at least visually inspected at least every two hours, or more frequently in inclement weather conditions, i.e., blowing snow and storms. Dogs with more robust medical needs will have care and monitoring as dictated by the Veterinarians.
15. **Anchorage:** Upon returning to Anchorage, the paperwork is reviewed and veterinary exams are once again performed. The top copy of the Return Dog Form is designated for release to the Musher's local handler.
    a. In Anchorage, Return Dogs are categorized by their needs:
        i. Stable health dogs awaiting transportation to their home kennels
        ii. Dogs with non-serious conditions requiring treatment and follow-up medications that can be provided by Anchorage Return Dog Veterinarians at no cost to the musher
        iii. Non-serious conditions where a dog needs to be transported to the musher's designated local veterinary facility for continued out-patient testing and care.
        iv. Dogs requiring 24-hr critical care (transported directly to PetER in Anchorage).

    When needed, dogs in categories ii and iii can be kept overnight under the direct supervision of the Anchorage Return Dog Veterinarians in their medical Trailer. Category iii dogs may be transported by the Local Contact person or ITC staff to the

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musher's contracted local Dog Care Agreement veterinary facility during regular business hours. Category iv dogs are taken by ITC staff directly to 24-hr PET Emergency Clinic.

b. **Tracker Unit Removal**: Tracker units and their collars need to be removed from Return Dogs once they are released from the jurisdiction of the ITC. These are given to the Return Dog Coordinator.
c. **Dog Log Quality Control:** Basic information on all Return Dogs (medical color status and medical condition) is entered into a digital dog log throughout the Return Dog Process, with an entry made every time a dog changes location as noted in point #13. As internet access can be intermittent on the trail, any omissions or errors in log entry are corrected and finalized by the Return Dog Team in Anchorage. The dog log is reviewed and is the basis for the Chief Veterinarian's post-race analysis, which is included in an ITC post-race board report.

16. **Communications**: Trail (Checkpoint) Veterinarians are instructed to communicate with Hub Return Dog Veterinarians and with the Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical Care about all dogs that have more concerning medical issues. All Return Dog Veterinarians and Trail Veterinarians are instructed to inform the Chief Veterinarian of any dogs deemed to need critical care ("RED" or "HIGH BLUE"). As stated in the rules, the Chief Veterinarian has access to medical records on any dog sent to a veterinary facility for up to 72 hours after they are released from the direct care of ITC veterinarians.

Now that the 16-point summary is reviewed, some further details on the handling of Return Dogs.

WALKING RETURN DOGS

Although a dog may have been discontinued from race participation, it does not mean it is not ready to run! These are extremely powerful animals. A leash that has a slip ring, also known as a slip lead, which tightens in the event that a dog might try to back out and escape, must be used during any movement of a dog on the ground and removed once secured in an aircraft or dog box. You MUST communicate with the pilot or driver when you have a firm grip of each dog and they can release the dog to you. Once a dog has been transferred to you, YOU are responsible to get the dog safely to the next destination point. The dog may be carried or walked on a leash.

A slip leash must be place around the dog's neck while being carried or walked. Dogs should never be walked by just holding onto the collar. Leashes should NOT be snapped to the collar, but rather, use a leash with a slip ring to prevent a dog from sliding its head out of a collar. No cleats/snow grippers are allowed due to the risk of stepping on a dog's foot while walking. Go slowly and communicate effectively when transferring a dog between people. All leashes must be around your wrist while walking a dog to reduce the risk of the leash slipping through your hand.

FEEDING RETURN DOGS

Mealtimes for Return Dog Hubs are scheduled for 08:00 and 20:00 hours with snacks given at 12:00 and 16:00. Scheduled feeding times for the small checkpoints are at 08:00, 16:00 and 24:00 hours. Return

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Dogs are also offered a snack following their initial check-in by the veterinarian(s), to assess appetites. The differences in feeding schedules between the Hubs and the small checkpoints are primarily related to varying locational differences including dog number expectations and staff schedules. Typically, the feeding will consist of a frozen meat that has been soaked in hot water for approximately 30 minutes to make a "soup" which is then ladled over about two cups of kibble. Snacks consist of frozen meats.

If a dog is not eating from the bowl, bring it to the attention of a veterinarian or other designated volunteer in charge of Return Dogs at that location. Sometimes sled dogs prefer eating right off the ground or need some extra coaxing with hand feeding. Canned food may also be available to tempt them. If the dog continues to refuse food and water, it is important to let a veterinarian know so he or she can monitor the dog more closely.

In the event that a dog is scheduled to fly within one to two hours, it is permissible to withhold a meal in preparation for travel; instead, a snack can be offered. Also, make every attempt to give a Return Dog the opportunity to defecate and urinate before loading. The pilots appreciate this!

LOOSE DOG PROACTIVE AND REACTIVE PROTOCOLS

All aspects of the Return Dog Program are very important, as mushers are depending on us to provide the best possible care of their dogs in the process of transporting them from the trail to Anchorage.

While under our care, it is imperative that no Return Dogs get loose. Even with our best efforts, however, this will occur on rare occasion. Every effort must be made in a proactive manner to prevent dogs from becoming loose.

It is paramount that every dog's primary collar remains properly fitted. This necessitates that collars remain adjustable and are regularly checked by mushers, veterinarians, and handlers, particularly since dogs lose weight during the race. In particular, as a dog is being Return, the collar must be evaluated to ensure that it is adequately snug to prevent it from slipping over the head.

If you notice trends of a team that has poorly fitted or poorly conditioned collars, please discuss this with the Musher and the Chief Veterinarian.

Return Dog personnel must always maintain firm control of Return Dogs that are not otherwise secured. Return Dog lines need to be anchored sufficiently tight to prevent dogs from contacting one another or for the line to become dislodged. As a volunteer you should be watchful of any dog that appears to be sleeping beyond its normal radius or curled up with another dog. You might notice a collar on the ground and a dog wandering around another team.

Whenever a dog is walked/moved on the ground, a slip lead must be used until the dog is secured on the Return Dog line, in a dog box/crate, or transferred to its handler.

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Soon after being Returned, Return Dog personnel will attach GPS tracker units to Return Dogs. This GPS tracking was initiated in 2023, and it is always under review for enhanced tracker ability. Each "tracker unit" consists of a numbered SPOT Trace tracker, its custom sewn and numbered nylon tracker sleeve and a Return Dog collar, the majority of which will be constructed of Velcro. The Return Dog Coordinator will have a spreadsheet which correlates SPOT Trace tracker numbers and their sleeve numbers. DO NOT separate the SPOT Trace trackers from their nylon sleeves! The primary function of the SPOT Trace trackers will be to enhance our ability to locate loose dogs, particularly in the event that they leave the checkpoint premises.

In general, the tracker sleeves should initially be placed so that they are centered on the top of the dog's neck and oriented so that the top of the number itself is towards the dog's head, and the bottom of the number is toward the dog's shoulder. This positioning enables for faster attachment and tensioning of the collar. For Return Dog collars not having counterweights (the vast majority), the yellow nylon sleeve with the enclosed SPOT Trace tracker will rotate from the top of the neck to underneath the neck relatively quickly, which is acceptable. A few of the Return Dog collar prototypes may have counterweights attached that need to be centered on the bottom of the neck, 180 degrees opposite of the tracker sleeve on top of the neck. Only those with counterweights would be expected to maintain the tracker sleeve on the top of a dog's neck.

Specific attachment instructions for each prototype will be demonstrated by those in leadership positions for the various aspects of the Return Dog Program.

When a tracker unit is placed on a Return Dog, the number shown on the yellow nylon tracker sleeve and dog tag number and letter must be reported to Comms as soon as possible. Please record this information on the page of the Return Dog Form handed to Comms. When writing the tracker number on a Return Dog Form, MAKE SURE that the writing is LEGIBLE. Comms will then communicate that information to the Return Dog Coordinator.

It is important to note that **certain commercial air carriers will require that the SPOT Trace tracker units be turned "off" prior to loading dogs onto their airplane(s). In the event that a tracker unit is removed from a dog prior to a commercial flight, the number on the sleeve of the tracker unit and the dog tag number and letter must be reported to the Return Dog Coordinator. Also, any removed tracker units will be handed over to the Hub Lead Handler. Please follow the direction from the Return Dog Coordinator in regard to specific commercial flights at each hub.**

Ultimately, once a Return Dog is released to its handler (usually Anchorage), the tracker unit will be taken off and given to the Return Dog Coordinator. Following the completion of this process, tracker units will be sent back out on the trail for repeat use.

The following are the steps to be taken if/when a Return Dog becomes loose:

- One's first instinct may be to chase the dog, but that is what we DON'T do.

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- Whoever is closest to the dog or sees it first, announces “LOOSE DOG”, to get the word out to personnel in the area.
- Monitor where the dog is going as much as possible, but without chasing it.
- If the identification of the dog is not immediately known, a review of Return Dog Forms and a headcount of Return Dogs at the checkpoint will be required to determine the dog’s team origin and identification.
- If the musher or other personnel from that dog’s kennel are present at the checkpoint, recruit them in the effort to catch a loose dog.
- Walking another dog, or better yet, a teammate, on a leash in the vicinity may also enhance the capture.
- If the dog continues to stay in the area, recruit assistance in carefully surrounding the dog and staying low to see if it will approach anyone. In addition to another dog, offering food and bedding may serve as enticements. If it approaches you, slowly reach for the collar while remaining in a low profile, and bring the dog back to the Return Dog line.
- If visual contact with the dog is lost, it is very important that Comms be notified of the event ASAP. Comms will first communicate with Logistics and the IAF to make pilots flying in the vicinity aware of a loose dog scenario, then Comms will contact other checkpoints up and down the trail, the Return Dog Coordinator, Race Marshal, and Chief Veterinarian, to make them aware of the incident.
- Comms at the originating checkpoint and other checkpoints up and down trail will also communicate to all mushers to be aware of the loose dog scenario.
- Be sure to also notify local residents of a loose dog, as they may encounter the dog moving in other parts of the community/checkpoint or on nearby trails.
- The Return Dog Coordinator will immediately notify the dog team’s primary contacts to gain insights into the dog’s personality and any suggestions of what technique(s) might work best for catching the dog. At that time, photos of the dog will be solicited, and a discussion of media involvement begun.
- Appropriate public media personnel will be notified and updated by the ITC through Press Releases and/or other established methods of communication, of the loose dog situation.
- The Return Dog Coordinator will monitor the satellite tracker of the Return Dog’s travel path to help guide the search efforts, particularly in scenarios where the dog has left the area and the use of airplanes and/or snowmachines are required.
- The Return Dog Coordinator may opt to recruit personnel from that’s dogs kennel who are in other locations and expedite transporting them to the checkpoint.
- Stay alert, as the dog may intermittently return to the area since they will become hungry, are generally social (part of a pack) and might know other dogs at the checkpoint.
- Following capture, notify Comms ASAP, who will then immediately inform Logistics, the IAF, Return Dog Coordinator, Race Marshal, Chief Veterinarian and other checkpoint Comms personnel of the outcome.
- Be sure to also inform and thank all other known participants of a successful capture.
- The ITC will release a final statement to the public media regarding the episode.

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SECTION 2: PROTOCOLS FOR TRAIL VETERINARIANS

READ SECTION 1 BEFORE READING THIS SECTION

As noted in the 16-point outline in SECTION 1, the first veterinarian into a checkpoint must either bring with them (or locate what might have already been loaded out) the Vet boxes and Red Dog Box (tote). A site to set up the drop line should be chosen that is sheltered from wind as much as possible, and close enough to checkpoint activities to allow for frequent observation. Make sure the Return Dog droplines are solidly anchored at both ends to prevent slackness from developing. Straw is available for bedding and serves as a great insulator.

As dog teams come into the checkpoint, you will interact with the musher and allow them to hand over care of a dog from their Team that they are discontinuing. They may already know they want to return a dog, or this may come as a result of checkpoint vet checks finding issues that should prompt return of the dog. When a dog is designated as a Return Dog, start a Return Dog Form for the dog. The Mushers must complete their part of the Return Dog Form AND sign it before releasing a dog from competition. As soon a musher signs the form, the dog is in your care. Do not have the Musher fill out and sign the form until they are ready to relinquish the dog- this prevents having a dog without paperwork or paperwork without a dog. An explanation of their reason(s) for returning is requested along with the musher's signature. An examination needs to be performed as soon as possible. It is not uncommon to identify conditions in addition to the ones listed as reasons for returning. Space is provided for checkpoint veterinarians to document previous relevant medications administered and current treatments. **Fill out this form thoroughly.**

Return Dog Forms

Return Dog forms are in QUADRUPLICATE. The bottom copy needs to be given to the communications personnel shortly after the musher returns the dog. It is NOT NECESSARY that the bottom copy has your medical notations—its purpose is to help comms keep an accurate account of Return Dogs located at the checkpoint, as well as the number of dogs leaving a checkpoint with any given team. The top two copies will travel with a Return Dog as it departs from a checkpoint, and the remaining copy stays at the checkpoint until the last veterinarian leaves, who will then take the 3rd copies for all Return Dogs with him/her. Those 3rd copies need to be brought to the Return Dog Coordinator or Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical in Anchorage, or Return Dog Team in McGrath, Unalakleet, or Nome (who will ultimately get them to Anchorage).

A "Condition Code" system has been developed for the Return Dog Forms, whereby illnesses are designated by four letters, and musculoskeletal injuries by three letters followed by L, R, LF, RF, LH or RH to indicate the appropriate anatomical location.

Also indicated on the Return Dog Form is the "Condition Status" box. As presented on the form, there are four designated conditions shown, including "RED", "HIGH BLUE", "LOW BLUE", and "WHITE." Dogs not in need of medications are officially considered to be "WHITE." Dogs with potentially life-threatening conditions are designated "RED" and are identified by RED flagging placed around the

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neck.

A “RED” collared dog is in need of air transportation to a medical facility in Anchorage ASAP. The Iditarod Air Force (IAF) will divert flights as needed to accomplish this. Obviously, we will do what is best for the dog in all situations, but please do not be casual about such designation due to the fact that a “RED” designation can dramatically impact flight schedules and staff movements on short notice.

All other dogs that are being medicated have historically been classified as “Blue.” Obviously, the condition of dogs receiving medication, but not in need of critical (“RED”) care, may vary from very minor to more serious. We have for several years designated more serious “Blue” dogs, i.e., pneumonia, myopathy or gastric ulcer suspects, requiring very close monitoring, as “HIGH BLUE.” The others are then “LOW BLUE,” showing they are stable but taking medication. These categories are on the Return Dog Form.

Mushers are asked to write the dogs’ names on their collars for easy identification. Make sure the collars and cable snaps are secure before leaving a dog. Dogs experiencing medical conditions that adversely affect their ability to withstand the elements must be brought inside. All dogs must be observed at least every two hours, and more frequently in inclement weather conditions. Vital taking frequency and treatments will depend on the severity of the illness/injury. Please refer to the Return Dog Medical lecture notes from the ISDVMA seminar.

Please continue exams and monitoring of any Return Dogs at the checkpoint until travel can be arranged. If you find the dog to be considered a “RED” or “HIGH BLUE” medical status, please contact the Chief Veterinarian immediately, followed by the Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical and/or veterinarian at the hub to where the dog is traveling. Contact numbers for all involved will be available to you for the race and at COMMS at every location.

Veterinarians must obviously address illnesses and injuries affecting all dogs during the race. However, Return Dogs are also dependent on us for food and shelter in remote checkpoints. Mushers are advised to provide for these needs while at the checkpoint, but once they depart, we assume this additional role.

Feeding Return Dogs

Meals are to be provided three times daily, specifically at 08:00, 16:00 and 24:00 hours. Since these dogs are resting, their caloric requirements will be reduced. Commercial diets are adequate, but they do enjoy the addition of meats. Water should be heated separately and added to the kibble and meat immediately prior to serving. We do have injectable Vitamin B-complex, which may help stimulate marginal appetites. If a dog does not eat at the regular mealtime, it must be noted on the Return Dog Form.

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When air travel is required, try to avoid feeding within one to two hours prior to a flight. Walking them for a few minutes before loading to allow for defecation and urination is also wise. The pilots are most appreciative of this!

Return Dog Locations Reporting

Communications personnel at all checkpoints will report Return Dogs at their locations to a digital dog log at 10:00 and 22:00 hours. Information entered into the Return Dog dog log includes: tag numbers, color medical status, GPS tracker number, and condition code.

Return Dog GPS tracker units will be placed on a Return Dogs at their checkpoint of origin. Each "tracker unit" consists of a numbered SPOT Trace tracker and its custom sewn nylon tracker sleeve (yellow in color and numbered), which is attached to a modified Return Dog collar (Velcro construction) separate from and behind the dog's primary racing collar. The primary function of the SPOT Trace trackers is to enhance our ability to locate loose dogs, particularly in the event that they leave the checkpoint premises.

When a tracker unit is placed on a Return Dog, the tracker number must be recorded at the top of the Return Dog form which his handed to Comms shortly after their hand-off from the Musher. When writing the tracker number on a Return Dog form, MAKE SURE that the writing is LEGIBLE. Comms will then enter this number into the Dog Log and communicate that information to the Return Dog Coordinator.

Loose Dog Proactive and Reactive Protocols

All aspects of the Return Dog Program are very important, as mushers are depending on us to provide the best possible care of their dogs in the process of transporting them from the trail to where they are picked up by a designated representative of their home kennel.

While under our care, it is imperative that no Return Dogs get loose, particularly when they depart from the premises at which they were Return. Even with our best efforts, however, this will occur on rare occasion. Detailed proactive and reactive protocols have been established for addressing the topic of loose dogs and are included in section 1 of this manual.

Air Travel Requirements for Return Dogs

All dogs must have coats/jackets removed and labeled prior to air travel, and Return Dogs must never be double boxed. Prior to takeoff, pilots need to be verbally informed of the need to maintain air temperatures at zero degrees F for the cargo area that dogs are located in.

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SECTION 3: PROTOCOLS FOR MCG/UNK TRAIL HUB VETERINARIANS

READ SECTION 1 BEFORE READING THIS SECTION

As noted in the 16-point outline in SECTION 1, the first veterinarian into a location (including a Return Dog Hun) must either bring with them (or more commonly, locate what might have been already been loaded out) the Vet boxes and Returned Dog Box (tote). These Return Dog Hubs have been selected based on abilities to house dogs near to where they can be loaded/flown out via cargo. A site to set up the drop line should be chosen (and is often the same location year-to-year) that is sheltered from wind as much as possible. Veterinarians for Return Dog hubs will have dedicated Return Dog Team as noted in Section 1 to assist in the whole process. This will be the Lead Handler and their team of 4-6 lay-handlers, and 3 veterinary technicians. They may already be there before you get there to help with set-up. Make sure the Return Dog droplines are solidly anchored at both ends to prevent slackness from developing. Straw is available for bedding and serves as a great insulator.

You generally will be flown into a Trail Hub 1-2 days before dogs start coming in. You may get dogs to you location before Musher's make it to the checkpoint at your location as well as some dogs are flown down trail and beat the Lead musher there.

As Trail Hub Return Dog Veterinarians, your first priority will be to perform a physical exam on each dog shortly after their arrival. Conditions can change during air travel from a smaller checkpoint to a Hub location, so it imperative that they be re-assessed. Any treatments will be continued or initiated as necessary, and then documented on the Return Dog Form that came with the dog. In the event that the Return Dog Form has not accompanied the dog in transit, you must contact the checkpoint from which the flight was initiated to get the information. You should already have been informed by a veterinarian from the originating checkpoint of any dogs that are of concern. Always, contact the Chief Veterinarian and the Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical Care to inform them of any dogs deemed to be of concern, and especially those that might be in serious or critical condition. Make sure that the Return Dog Forms are in order and travel with the dogs on their return flight to Anchorage.

Beyond this, you will be ultimately responsible for the general care of Return Dogs while in the Hubs, assisted be assisted by the veterinary technicians and dog handlers.

Vehicles (snowmachines and/or four wheelers) will be designated for Return Dog personnel at the Hubs. Specifically designed sleds will be pulled by these vehicles for the purpose of transporting Return Dogs at the Hub locations (as the actually checkpoint is often ~1 mile away).

Housing boxes may be available for dogs that are to remain outside in inclement weather conditions. Dogs experiencing medical conditions that adversely affect their ability to withstand the elements must be brought inside, for which Sky Kennels will be provided. Remember, all Return Dogs must be visually inspected at least every two hours, or more frequently in severe weather conditions, i.e., blowing snow and storms.

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In Hub locations, meals are to be provided at the mandated times of 08:00 and 20:00 hours with snacks at 12:00 and 16:00 hours. For those of you who might not be familiar with the 24-hour time designation, please learn it since we are working throughout the day and night, using the 12-hour time system can create confusion.

Any dog with a questionable appetite must be closely monitored for underlying health abnormalities. Commercial kibble will be provided by the ITC for hub Return Dogs. However, there will also likely be a variety of foods (kibble, meat, fish, fat) left behind by mushers at the Hub checkpoint that might be helpful as "baits" to entice anorexic dogs. The commercial diets are adequate, but the dogs do enjoy the addition of meats. Water should be heated separately and added to the kibble and meat immediately prior to serving, unless ambient temperatures are warm, in which case a bowl of cool water might be more desirable. We do have injectable Vitamin B-complex which may also help stimulate marginal appetites. Don't forget to make a notation on the Return Dog Form for any dog that is not eating sufficiently.

When air travel to Anchorage is scheduled, try to avoid feeding within one to two hours prior to a flight. Walking them for a few minutes before loading to allow for defecation and urination is also wise. The pilots are most appreciative of this!

Return Dog Locations Reporting
Communications personnel at checkpoints will report Return Dogs at their locations to a digital dog log at 10:00 and 22:00 hours, and your team will have to do the same for the Return Dog Hubs. Information entered into the Return Dog dog log includes: tag numbers, color medical status, and condition code. More training on the Dog Log will be available at race time.

Return Dog GPS tracker units will be placed on a Return Dogs at their checkpoint of origin. Each "tracker unit" consists of a numbered SPOT Trace tracker and its custom sewn nylon tracker sleeve (yellow in color and numbered), which is attached to a modified Return Dog collar (Velcro construction) separate from and behind the dog's primary racing collar. The primary function of the SPOT Trace trackers is to enhance our ability to locate loose dogs, particularly in the event that they leave the checkpoint premises.

When a tracker unit is placed on a Return Dog, the tracker number must be recorded at the top of the Return Dog form which his handed to Comms shortly after their hand-off from the Musher. When writing the tracker number on a Return Dog form, MAKE SURE that the writing is LEGIBLE. Comms will then enter this number into the Dog Log and communicate that information to the Return Dog Coordinator.

Certain commercial air carriers will require that the tracker units be removed and/or turned "off" prior to loading dogs onto their airplane(s). In cases where removal is required, the number on the

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sleeve of the tracker unit and the dog tag number and letter must be reported to the Return Dog Coordinator. Also, any removed tracker units will be handed over to the Lead Hub Handler. Please follow the direction from the Return Dog Coordinator in regard to specific commercial flights at each hub.

Loose Dog Proactive and Reactive Protocols

All aspects of the Return Dog Program are very important, as mushers are depending on us to provide the best possible care of their dogs in the process of transporting them from the trail to where they are picked up by a designated representative of their home kennel.

While under our care, it is imperative that no Return Dogs get loose, particularly when they depart from the premises at which they were Return. Even with our best efforts, however, this will occur on rare occasion. Detailed proactive and reactive protocols have been established for addressing the topic of loose dogs and are included in section 1 of this manual.

Air Travel Requirements for Return Dogs

All dogs must have coats/jackets removed and identified (musher/dog name) prior to air travel, and Return Dogs must never be double boxed. Prior to takeoff, pilots need to be verbally informed of the need to maintain air temperatures at zero degrees F for the cargo area that dogs are located in.

Notes Specific for Nome

There are relatively few Return Dogs processed in Nome, and therefore, the staffing of the Return Dog program in Nome is less robust than McGrath and Unalakleet. However, dog handling and care should be consistent with the other Hubs. In Nome, there is the dog lot (Nome Dog Lot) where finishing teams are cared for/housed by the handlers of the mushers, the mushers themselves, and the Nome Dog Lot volunteers. The Nome Dog Lot is under the supervision of the Nome Dog Lot Coordinator.

The care of finishing dog teams is separate from the Return Dogs, as finishers are not under direct veterinary care. Return Dogs are housed in a section of the same lot and are managed similarly with a Lead Handler, Veterinary Technician, and Veterinarians. Duties of all involved in Nome may extend beyond just Return Dogs and include Seppala award help (see later) as well as discharging dogs back to the Musher.

Discharging Return Dogs from Nome

The vast majority of Return Dogs will be discharged from Nome Return Dog care directly to their musher in Nome. However, those dogs must receive the same paperwork protocol as the dogs that get processed through Anchorage. Please review the Anchorage Return Dog protocol for dog release including use of the Return Dog Discharge Form (Appendix 1) as needed.

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SECTION 4: PROTOCOL FOR ANCHORAGE VETERINARIANS

READ SECTION 1 BEFORE READING THIS SECTION

The purpose of the Anchorage Return Dog Veterinarians is to triage and treat ALL dogs returning from the Iditarod trail before they are Return to local handlers, mushers, dog yards, and in some cases, other veterinary hospitals.

Before the Iditarod begins, all mushers must fill-out and sign their Dog Care Agreement which allows consents for treatment and medical decisions making by the Iditarod Veterinary Team. It also instructs Mushers to designate two "Local Contacts" and a "Local Veterinary Hospital." Local Contact persons (handlers) are responsible for picking up and housing any Return Dogs from the Musher's Team until the dogs can be Return to their regular homes/dog yards. The local veterinary hospital can continue non-emergency continued care of injuries/illness/etc., of Return Dogs after their release from the Anchorage Return Dog Veterinarians. About 25 – 30% of the racing dogs will become Return Dogs and come through Anchorage. The local contacts and local veterinary clinics are support for continued care as there are not the location and resources to continue care for all of them for the whole race. This is a "divide and conquer" method to ensure the support needed is broad.

The information from the Dog Care Agreement will be made available by the Return Dog Coordinator in a shared spreadsheet.

As Anchorage is the Headquarters for the race and also Return Dog Program, the housing, abilities, and logistics are broader than at the trail hubs. But the concept is similar: triage and treat dogs, and discharge them to their respective areas. The MAIN difference, is these dogs are going to be leaving the ITC hands- so their exam/treatment and plans need to be scrutinized closely as another ITC Veterinarians will not be receiving this dog at their local dog yard of veterinary hospital.

Facilities

Return Dog is headquartered out of Conex/Trailers (one for office needs, and one for medical) located behind the hotel in the back parking lot. The Return Dog Coordinator and Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical will have already planned the layout and needs for this location. You should coordinate with your Veterinarian in Charge as to the set-up of the medical trailer.

Like the Trail hubs, you will have dedicated veterinary technicians and handlers to help care for the Return Dogs. Enhanced supply quantities will be provided n Veterinary boxes for you and your assisting - one is the office and one is the medical trailer.

The Return Dog Coordinator and their Lead handler and lay-handlers will set up the dog lot on the hotel grounds behind the hotel.

Operations

Return Dogs are brought from small checkpoints at which they were discontinued from race

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participation either directly back to the hotel via IAF or cargo-flown in from the larger Trail Hub (McGrath, Unalakleet) for exams, treatment, and eventual release. These Trail hubs are part of the Return Dog Program and have the same type of dedicated Return Dog Team of vets, vet techs, and handlers. Most of the Return Dogs in Nome, however, are typically not sent back to Anchorage by the ITC, but rather, travel home with their teams.

Dogs traveling from the Hubs to Anchorage will likely arrive in larger groups on commercial cargo flights (up to 80 dogs at a time). Since the distance from Anchorage increases as the race continues, longer flights are necessary is to get these dogs back to Anchorage. Subsequently, these planes generally come in the later afternoon to evening. However, Anchorage Return Dog Veterinarians should expect to get multiple arrivals of dogs at any time of the day (generally from 09:00-23:00 hours). The private IAF planes do not fly at night, therefore the smaller numbers of dogs coming in on these flights will arrive during daylight hours only.

Ultimately, Return Dogs will typically arrive at the Lakefront Hotel in one of two ways:

1. In private IAF planes (up to 10 dogs) on the frozen lake out behind the hotel
2. In trucks coming from the local airport where the dogs have arrived either on IAF flights (wheels) with up to 10 dogs, or commercial cargo planes with as many as 80 dogs

At least one veterinarian +/- veterinary technician will go to the airport to meet the plane coming in to ensure there is no immediate medical emergency needing to be addressed after the dogs land and before the dogs are brought to the hotel. As their health status can change in flight, this is a quick “eyes on” evaluation in their boxes before further transport. A separate “crash bag” is made with supplies that must accompany those going to meet the plane in case they are needed.

Depending on the number of dogs being received will dictate the number of lay-handlers will be involved in unloading planes and loading the Anchorage dog trailer for transport back to the hotel. Return Dog Handlers will unload dogs from the planes and transport them to the Lakefront by dog trucks/trailer. After their arrival at the Lakefront Hotel, the Return Dogs will be secured to droplines running along the fence and tree-line at the back of the hotel. Female and Male sections of the dog lot will be laid out and a map drawn. This is where the Return Dog Veterinarians will examine the dogs. Every Return Dog must be examined by an Anchorage Return Dog Veterinarian before it is released.

Return Dog Forms for the dogs will be on the same flight as the dogs. They should be sent to you in alpha-numerical order. This aids in putting them in order once the dogs are divided and secured to the drop lines.

Scratched team (a team that has quit the race) dogs are also transported on the same cargo planes as the Return Dogs. The Return Dog Coordinator will arrange their pick-up from the airport directly as these dogs are not part of the Return Dog Program and thus do not require exam. That being said, they should be watched coming off the plane to ensure they look stable and can go to their Musher’s dog truck. If you feel any look like they may need closer scrutiny, perform a physical exam as we know medical status can change

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in flight.

While working in Anchorage, you will have numerous helpers with varying levels of dog handling experience as provided by the Return Dog Coordinator. Some may be dedicated to office work, some to cleaning, some to driving, and some capable of all duties. Anchorage requires up to about 15 – 20 volunteers as compared to the Trail hubs that have 6. Regardless of the lay-staff experience, they are eager to assist and are invaluable. All of them will have received, at minimum, a "crash course" in their Anchorage duties. New volunteers will be limited to helping shovel snow, picking up feces, bedding and feeding dogs. The more experienced volunteers (Return Dog Handlers) can do this in addition to helping unload and load dogs on and off planes and trucks, and be holders +/- scribe for your exam. If a Return Dog Handler is your scribe (since veterinary technicians are not always available for this), it is good to familiarize yourself with the appropriate short-hand terms (abbreviations) for which they should have already have been prepped by the Return Dog Coordinator (i.e. HR for heart rate, RR for respiratory rate, MM for mucous membranes, CRT for capillary refill time, LF/RF/LH/RH for each limb, etc.). Please refer to the "Return Dog Form" for areas that will need to be filled in and to familiarize yourself with the codes for medical and musculoskeletal conditions that you will be dictating to them.

Each dog will have an ID tag hanging from its collar (team number and dog letter) which should match the number and letter on their paperwork ("Return Dog Form"). Upon their arrival in Anchorage, two copies of the Return Dog Form (top two from the quadruplicate form) should accompany each dog from the checkpoint from which they were Return. Once they are lined out, and paperwork put in order, exams can begin. AFTER an exam in completed, straw should be placed on the ground by Return Dog personnel for the dogs to lie down. All dogs should have had their examinations completed BEFORE offering any food. If you try to feed each dog as you go, neighboring dogs can be harder to examine as they often are trying to get to their neighboring dogs' food.

Be systematic about your approach to each shipment of dogs. Once you build a routine, it will help you process shipments of dogs faster. Unless a dog appears to have a more serious condition, it is best to just start at one side of the dropline, and go dog-by-dog. Do not feel rushed or let any local contacts try and have you examine a dog that is at the end of the line first. This leads to confusion, paperwork getting out of order, and ultimately slows the process of the dog load. The only exception is a dog that appears to need attention sooner. Your veterinary technician and handler team will be heavily involved in each step from unlading, paperwork ordering, microchip scanning, etc., and can assist in helping identify dogs that maybe should be examined first. Generally, it will take anywhere from 2-6 hours to process dog loads that range from 20 – 80 dogs respectively.

Return Dog Form

It is important to emphasize that the top WHITE and second yellow copy (top two) should accompany each dog back to Anchorage. However, sometimes the paperwork gets lost in the shuffle along the trail and there may be only the WHITE or yellow copy when a Return Dog arrives in Anchorage. If this is the case, just complete your exam on whatever is provided and a copy will be made by the Return Dog

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Coordinator and their office team. All of your notes should, ideally, be included on this Return Dog Form (except for dogs having medical issues that require more information. A separate discharge instruction form (Appendix 1) is available for you to fill out to provide the musher's local contact of more detailed information. Dogs that often get this additional discharge instruction are: pneumonia dogs, systemic illness dogs, profound lameness/fracture/etc. Anything that requires more info than the R&R and possible few days medication should get a discharge form. In general, ~10 – 20% of Return Dogs get added Discharge Forms.

Following the examination of all dogs, it is best to convene in the Return Dog trailer with your colleague(s) to go over paperwork (including signing the forms) and to dispense medication as needed. If medications are indicated, they are dispensed into sandwich bags with an index card describing the drug name, tablet size, and instructions (i.e. Clavamox 375mg tablets- Give ONE tablet by mouth twice daily with food). It is a good idea to have a supply of these medications pre-made in their respective sandwich bags to help the process go more quickly. Use your veterinary technician team to pre-make these baggies and organize/arrange the trailer for highest efficiency for processing large loads of dogs. This is best accomplished during the 1-2 days leading up to the start of the race or during downtimes while awaiting shipments of dogs to examine. Try not to dispense more than a few days' worth of medication early on so supplies do not run out (refer to supplies/medications normally provided in communications from the Chief Veterinarian). As Vet Boxes come back from the closed checkpoints, feel free to use these to enhance your stock and allow larger dispensed amounts. In general, three-day supply is provided by the ITC with instructions to get further medications if indicated by their local designated veterinary hospital. If you recommend this, please do so with a discharge instruction form.

The dispensed medications are then stapled to the left side of the WHITE copy of the Return Dog Form and both the WHITE/yellow copies and medications are given to the Return Dog Coordinator and their office staff. The Coordinator will have the Local Contact person sign the Return Dog Form and give them the WHITE copy with the medications attached. If a dog is to receive discharge instructions (see notes about this form), a photocopy of this must be made so we have one stapled to our copy of the Return Dog Form as well as one for the handler.

Return Dog Program retains the yellow form. Before handing the WHITE form to the local contact, the Return Dog Coordinator and their team will take a digital photo of the forms that are most legible and put them into a shared folder for review. This allows helpful review abilities for the Anchorage Veterinarians and Chief Veterinarian without having the physical form in front of them.

Triage aspect of the Return Dog position:

All dogs are designated a condition color status when they are discontinued from race participation (RED= critical- life-threatening condition, HIGH BLUE= concerning medical condition requiring medication and monitoring- and can become critical anytime, LOW BLUE = stable but getting medication, WHITE= stable with no medication).

Examples:

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1. RED status- weak/lethargic dog with pale mucous membranes- suspected gastrointestinal (GIT) ulceration; coughing dog with increased respiratory rate and effort +/- purulent nasal discharge and lethargy- suspect pneumonia
2. HIGH BLUE status- coughing dog that appears relatively normal otherwise
3. LOW BLUE status- dog discontinued from race participation for lameness that needs analgesia
4. WHITE status- dog discontinued from race participation for musher strategy; dog discontinued from race participation for lameness that is no longer lame; dog in heat; not needing medication

When examining a dog, it is important to look at the entire animal, not just the area of the body for which the dog was originally discontinued from race participation, as their problems and status can change during their initial return to their release from Anchorage. Remember to perform a full exam- this includes a rectal temperature. This should be completed at least at time of Return in the remote checkpoint, and arrival each transport to another location. If a dog was deemed WHITE, then rectal temperature checks are at the discretion of the Vet taking care of the dog. Remember medical conditions can creep in, so it may be prudent to do this at least once daily.

Removal of Return Dog Tracker Units

GPS tracker units will be placed on a select number of Return Dogs at their checkpoint of origin. Each "tracker unit" consists of a SPOT Trace tracker and its custom sewn nylon tracker sleeve (yellow in color and numbered), which is attached to a modified Return Dog collar separate from the dog's primary racing collar. The primary function of the SPOT Trace trackers is to enhance our ability to locate loose dogs, particularly if they leave the checkpoint premises.

Tracker units must be removed prior to releasing a Return Dog from the jurisdiction of the ITC. Immediately after removal, the number on the sleeve of the tracker unit and the dog tag number and letter must be reported to the Return Dog Coordinator. Also, removed tracker units will be handed over to the Return Dog Coordinator.

Post-Examination:

Following their examinations by the Anchorage Return Dog Veterinarians, Return Dogs will go to one of four locations:

1. **Released to their Local Contact**: These dogs are picked up from the hotel. They are deemed healthy enough to be Return to a dog yard (where they will likely be tethered outside with access to an individual doghouse) and have minimal extra needs except.
2. **Overnight at the Lakefront Hotel Return Dog Facility:** These dogs should be kept in the Return Dog Medical Facility only during the time medically needed to treat them to stability where they can go to either their Local Contact person or to their designated local veterinary hospital (as indicated on the Dog Care Agreement Form). Dogs kept in the Return Dog Medical Facility will be supervised 24-7 through the night by the Anchorage Return Dog Veterinary Technicians. **REMEMBER** If a Return Dog arrives in Anchorage during the early hours of the day and it is stable, but in need of diagnostics/treatment, please try to send it to the local DVM as indicated

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on the Dog Care Agreement Form. Their Local Contact person should then pick the dog up from the hotel and take it directly to this local DVM.

3. **PET Emergency** (2320 East Dowling Road, Anchorage, Alaska- a 24-hr Emergency Veterinary Hospital). Dogs requiring this care are deemed unstable and need emergency treatment, more than can be provided by the Anchorage Return Dog Veterinarians. They require 24-hour hospitalization/treatment with DVM supervision.

PetER

The Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical Care must always be informed of any animals that need to be sent to PET Emergency. When an animal is taken to PET Emergency, further treatment and hospitalization is at the discretion of the DVM at this hospital. The Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical Care will be in communication with PET Emergency for status updates, make reasonable efforts to keep the musher informed of those updates and ultimately, assist in coordinating the release of a dog with the Local Contact person once the dog is deemed stable (both by PET Emergency DVM and Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical Care).

Following their release from PetER to the Local Contact person or to their contracted Dog Care Agreement vet facility, will be followed by status update requests by the Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical Care at least once daily, for up to 72 hours (the required time we are responsible for following their health). Update information should be documented on the "**Return Dog Follow-up Sheet" as provided in the Anchorage Return Dog Paperwork folders.** Further logistical information regarding any dogs going to PetER will be provided by the Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical.

<u>To summarize:</u>

All dogs should be out of your hands within the first 12-24 hours of arrival at the Lakefront. **After removal of their tracker units**, a Return Dog will go either to:

1. Directly to their Local Contact person after arrival at the Lakefront
2. The Lakefront Return Dog Medical Facility
3. The veterinary facility indicated on their musher's Dog Care Agreement
4. PET Emergency

***If there are any issues, contact the Veterinary in Charge of Return Dog Medical Care.

<u>Notes:</u>

Always give your best recommendations when discharging these dogs. If you think the dog needs to be housed inside, then instruct so. If you think they should have follow-up x-rays or bloodwork, then instruct that in your discharges.

The most common injuries that you will see are described in previous communications from the Chief Veterinarian. Please review them.

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Remember, these dogs are endurance athletes, and a lot of orthopedic injuries are immediately treated by rest associated with being discontinued from race participation from the race. Not all lame animals require several days of analgesics (specifically NSAIDs). These animals are prone to gastric ulceration already, so barring the need for pronounced analgesia (maybe combining NSAID and other analgesic), try to use something other than an NSAID, like tramadol and gabapentin, if possible.

Do not let the volunteers or the Return Dog staff rush you. Often, the Local Contact person will show up to collect their dogs before you have finished examining them. Take your time and be thorough. Do not release a dog you feel uncomfortable releasing. Remember, you are a volunteer too and need to be confident that you have made the best medical decisions and recommendations.

You will be provided with a vehicle to travel around Anchorage between the airport, PET Emergency, etc. Please take care of the vehicles. They are for Veterinarian use only.

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SECTION 5: PROTOCOL FOR MCG/UNK TRAIL HUB HANDLERS

READ SECTION 1 BEFORE READING THIS SECTION

As a Return Dog volunteer for the Iditarod in McGrath and Unalakleet, you will be responsible for the overall care of the Return Dogs as well as the feeding, medicating, cleaning, strawing, safety, and the general well-being of all the Return Dogs at either McGrath or Unalakleet. The following protocols have been established for these responsibilities. Keep in mind additional duties may be assigned as required, and all tasks will be performed at the discretion of the Return Dog Veterinarian(s) and Return Dog Coordinator. You have been chosen to care for the Return Dogs because of your skills and expertise in working with these incredibly special athletes.

Upon arrival at the checkpoint, locate the equipment that has been shipped to the checkpoint for use with the dogs. Set up the dropline and locate straw, doghouses, a water source, and dog food. All handlers (Lead and other) will meet with the Return Dog Veterinarian(s) and their Veterinary Technicians to confirm protocols for that location.

Receiving Return Dogs from The Iditarod Air Force (IAF)

Lead Handler or Veterinary Team will be advised by Logistics the time that Return Dogs will arrive from the checkpoints and the number of dogs on each IAF plane. Space will be designated on the dropline for the new arrivals, and crates or doghouses will be put out with straw for each dog. The Return Dog Handlers on duty will approach the IAF plane when it has shut down. Be sure to get the eye of the pilot before approaching for safety reasons. Also, bring 1 or 2 slip leashes with you to transfer the dogs from the plane to the dropline. When the pilot or passenger opens the door, be ready to slip a leash on the dog and carry it from the plane to a safe distance. DO NOT ALLOW DOGS TO JUMP FROM THE PLANE IN ORDER TO AVOID INJURIES. The dog may then be walked to the dropline. Remember you will be walking on packed snow and icy surfaces, so watch your step. TAKE NOTICE OF ANY FEMALES THAT MAY BE IN ESTRUS (IN HEAT). The Lead Handler will take the paperwork (Return Dog Form) for each dog from the pilot. This is the ITC's official medical record. Each dog should arrive with a metal neckline (Return Dog Cable) attached to its collar. If not, attach one from the supplies at the checkpoint.

Depending on their condition, each dog should be snapped onto the dropline and the neckline should stay secure around the neck. Make sure that you do NOT attach a dog with both the dropline and a Return Dog Cable, as the two could become twisted together causing ever increasing tightening around a dog's neck potentially leading to strangulation. If a Return Dog Cable is on the dog, it is best to attach the loose end to the "D" ring on the collar. Check to make sure collars are not too loose to allow a dog to slip out of his or her collar.

Double check all dogs on their sex and place females in the designated areas to prevent unwanted breeding. Any females IN HEAT will be marked by a bright pink tag tied to their collars.

Once the dogs are secure on the dropline, the Return Dog Veterinarian(s) should then be notified that dogs have arrived so they can do an examination on each dog. A Return Dog Handler or Veterinary

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Technician may be chosen to scribe for the veterinarian recording such information as heart rate, hydration level, temperature, what medications the dog is on (if any) and overall condition of the dog. All information should be written on the Return Dog Forms received from the pilots. The examining veterinarian will then decide if any dogs need to be housed indoors; if so, the Return Dog Handler will prepare a crate in the assigned indoor area. In some instances, a second Return Dog Handler may be required to hold a dog while its temperature is being taken or other examinations are being done by the veterinarian. The Lead Handler or Veterinary Technician will add to a Master List/Dog Map of the lot the dog's tag number, sex, and whether the dog is a female in season. All dogs will be welfare checked every 2 hours around the clock in addition to any medical needs as determined by the veterinarians. Return Dog Handlers will be assigned duty hours by the Return Dog Coordinator and/or the Lead Handler.

Apply a GPS tracker as instructed in Section 1.

Feeding Return Dogs

In the Hubs, Return Dogs will be fed at 08:00 and 20:00 hours with snacks at 12:00 and 16:00 hours. The feeding will consist of frozen meat that has been soaked in hot water for approximately 30 minutes to make a "soup". Two to three cups of soup are then ladled over about 2 cups of kibble. If a dog is not eating from the bowl, bring it to the attention of the Hub Return Dog Coordinator. Sometimes sled dogs prefer eating right off the ground or need some extra coaxing with hand feeding. Canned food may also be available to tempt them. If the dog continues to refuse food and water, it is important to let the Lead Handler and Medical Team know so they can monitor the dog more closely.

Return Dog Locations Reporting

Lead Handler or Medical Team will update the dog log, ensuring its accuracy twice daily (10:00 and 22:00 hours).

Certain commercial air carriers will require that the tracker units be removed and/or turned "off" prior to loading dogs onto their airplane(s). In cases where removal is required, the number on the sleeve of the tracker unit and the dog tag number and letter must be reported to the Return Dog Coordinator. Also, any removed tracker units will be handed over to the hub Lead handler. Please follow the direction from the Return Dog Coordinator about specific commercial flights at each hub.

Administering Medications to Return Dogs

If a dog requires medications, it will be noted on the Return Dog Form. The times the meds should be administered will be written on the Return Dog Form also. The veterinary technicians will be responsible for dispensing and tracking medications per the veterinarian's orders.

Walking Return Dogs

As a rule, a Return Dog is ideally not in our care for more than a day. However, in instances where 24 hours have passed, the Lead Handler or a Return Dog Veterinarian may ask if any handlers want to

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walk the dogs. Although a dog may have been discontinued from race participation, it may still be ready to run! These are extremely powerful animals. A slip lead must be used on every dog that is not secured to a dropline, the handle of the leash must also be looped around your wrist. Any walking of a Return Dog must be cleared with the Lead Handler.

Dog Housing

McGrath and Unalakleet will have constructed doghouses for sheltering during inclement weather. Utilize these as needed. Dogs must still be checked at least every two hours even when housed. Make sure that escapes do not occur when transferring dogs from houses to Return Dog droplines!

Maintaining The Return Dog Area

It is important to keep the Return Dog lot area cleared of any feces or debris. The only time feces should be left on the ground is if a dog is exhibiting diarrhea or has bloody stools, especially prior to being checked by a veterinarian upon arrival to the dropline. Once the dogs have been checked, their areas should be kept clean at all times. It is not uncommon for the stools to be loose initially. The dogs have been racing and need to rest. If the problem continues, however, it should be brought to the attention of the Lead Handler who will then advise a Return Dog Veterinarian. Once a dog leaves the checkpoint, the dirty straw should be cleared from the dropline and the area should be prepared with clean straw.

Providing Well Being and Safety Checks for All Dogs

Return Dog Handlers will be checking the dropline every 2 hours around the clock to be sure all the dogs are safe and resting comfortably. If at any time you notice any dog exhibiting unusual behavior, raspy breathing, coughing, shivering, etc. notify the Lead Handler immediately. A Return Dog Veterinarian will then examine the dog. If it is exceptionally windy, very cold or you see a dog's straw has been blown away, add more. Check with the Lead Handler to see if the dogs can be moved to a warmer location out of the wind. There are dog coats and dog blankets available for Return Dogs. As the sun goes down, the dogs will benefit from extra cover. Some dogs do not tolerate the blankets and will shake them off. In those cases, piling some straw over them is an option. Monitor for dogs that may be chewing on any dog coats or blankets and remove the material immediately and report it to a Return Dog Veterinarian.

As you patrol the Return Dog dropline, pick up any debris such as paper wrappers, twine, plastic bags, dog booties, any sharp objects, etc. that the dogs could either swallow or step on. It is also important that no stray dogs enter the dog lot. If they do, try to coax them out. Should they come in contact with one of the Iditarod sled dogs, do not get into the middle of them if a dogfight ensues. Call for help!

Loose Dog Proactive and Reactive Protocols

All aspects of the Return Dog Program are very important, as mushers are depending on us to provide the best possible care of their dogs in the process of transporting them from the trail to where they are picked up by a designated representative of their home kennel.

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While under our care, it is imperative that no Return Dogs get loose, particularly when they depart from the premises at which they were Return. Even with our best efforts, however, this will occur on rare occasion. Detailed proactive and reactive protocols have been established for addressing the topic of loose dogs and are included in section 1 of this manual.

Transferring Return Dogs to An Airplane

The Lead Handler will facilitate the dogs being transferred to Anchorage or Nome. The Return Dog Handlers will be notified of the approximate time that this will be happening. Dogs should not be fed major meals within 1-2 hours of the flight. A small snack can be given up to 2 hours before the flight. The Medical Team will decide which dogs will fly first, with RED-tagged dogs having the highest priority (flying with a veterinarian or technician on commercial charter- NOT in cargo), followed by HIGH BLUE-tagged dogs, then LOW BLUE-tagged dogs and females in heat. Otherwise, every effort will be made to have dogs that have been in the checkpoint the longest, fly first. Just prior to loading into the plane, all dogs will be walked to facilitate elimination. The Lead Handler will then stand by the loading area and call for the dogs. As the dogs are loaded into dog boxes the Return Dog handler will call out the tag number and letter of their dog, lift the dog the box, remove the leash, secure the door, and return to the dropline for another dog. One handler will stay at the box and double check that the doors are secure. Any HIGH BLUE dogs deemed stable by the Veterinarian to fly via cargo will have a blue carabineer attached to the door lock to flag them. The Lead Handler will then pass the Return Dog Forms **(that should have been placed in ALPHANUMERIC order)** to the pilot and confirm that the cargo area in which the dogs are located will be maintained at zero degrees F. Once this has been accomplished, the Lead Handler will call the Return Dog Coordinator with the information on how many dogs will be arriving, confirm the accuracy of the dog log to show which dogs are coming via dog tag, make any corrections in this, and the estimated arrival time of the plane.

Air Travel Requirements for Return Dogs

All dogs must have coats/jackets removed and labeled prior to air travel and Return Dogs must never be double boxed. As previously stated, prior to takeoff, pilots need to be verbally informed of the need to maintain air temperatures at zero degrees F for the cargo area that dogs are located in.

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SECTION 6: PROTOCOLS FOR NOME HANDLERS

READ SECTION 1 BEFORE READING THIS SECTION

Nome is unique in the sense that there is the dog lot (Nome Dog Lot) where dogs in finishing teams and Return Dogs coexist. Those in finishing teams are cared for/housed by the handlers of the mushers, the mushers themselves, and the Nome Dog Lot volunteers, under the direction of the Nome Dog Lot Coordinator. Return Dogs are positioned in a section of the Nome Dog Lot, or potentially a medical Conex/trailer, and are the main focus of your care. However, the Nome Dog Lot Coordinator and the Return Dog Handler work as a team on behalf of all dogs in the lot.

As a volunteer for the Iditarod in the Nome Return Dog program, you will be primarily responsible for the overall care of the Return Dogs as well as the security, general well-being and maintenance of them in the Nome Dog Lot.

The following protocols have been established for some of the primary responsibilities. Keep in mind additional duties may be assigned as required, and all tasks will be performed at the discretion of the Nome Dog Lot Coordinator.

Receiving Return Dogs

Return Dogs are those dogs the mushers leave at checkpoints for a variety of reasons ranging from health concerns, females coming into heat, or general attitude problems, to name a few. These dogs are flown to Nome depending where in the race the dogs are discontinued from race participation, the stage of the race (early, middle, late) and corresponding logistical considerations.

For dogs arriving in Nome by plane, a driver will be sent to the Nome Airport to receive Return Dogs from the pilot and then transport them to the dog lot. Dogs that are discontinued from race participation at Safety (the last checkpoint of the race) are transported by snowmachine to the Nome Dog Lot. Upon their arrival, the dogs are under our care until the mushers complete the race and the Return Dogs are reunited with their teams.

In most cases the Nome Return Dog Lead Handler will be advised when Return Dogs are arriving and the number of dogs. Space will be designated for the new arrivals, and crates will be put out with straw in them.

Return Dog Handlers will be responsible for the transferring of any Return Dog from plane to truck and truck to dropline. In all cases, you must communicate with the driver when you have a firm grip of the dog and he or she can release the dog to you. Once the driver releases the dog, YOU are responsible to get the dog safely to his crate on the line. The dog may be carried, or walked on a slip leash. Remember you will be walking on snow packed and icy surfaces, but NO cleats or snow grippers are permitted in the lot.

Once all the dogs are secured, a Return Dog Handler or Veterinary Technician will update the Return

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Dog Chart with each dog's tag number, its name (if available), and the musher's name. The paperwork that travels with the dog will be put in the order in which the dogs are on the dropline. At that time, the Handlers and Technician will advise the veterinarian(s) on duty in the Mini Center that the Return Dogs are ready to be checked. A veterinary technician or handler will be chosen to scribe for the veterinarian; recording such information as heart rate, hydration level, temperature, and overall condition of the dog. In some instances, a second veterinary technician or handler may be required to hold a dog while its temperature is being taken or other examinations are being done by the veterinarian. Veterinarians typically will take the paperwork with them to the Mini Center to make any additional notes and/or prepare any necessary medications.

A Conex trailer is just outside the Mini Center for Return Dogs requiring extra shelter. The veterinarian(s) will decide which, if any, dogs will be transferred to the trailer. A chart similar to the one used for the dog lot will be updated indicating which dog(s) is/are being housed in the trailer.

Releasing Return Dog to the Musher

When a Return Dog's team and musher arrive and the team is settled in, either the musher or a handler for the team will be advised that a Return Dog is in our care. A veterinarian will have indicated on the Return Dog Form whether the dog can be released without further consultation, or in some instances the veterinarian may want to discuss the dog's condition prior to releasing it to the musher. When a Return Dog is ready to join its team, the musher or his/her handler will sign the Return Dog Form showing that they have taken possession of the dog. The WHITE copy of the form and any medications will go with the dog and musher. The yellow copy of the form will be retained for ITC records and the Return Dog Chart update. Ensure any GPS tracker is removed from the dog before release to the Musher. Please review the section in Anchorage Veterinary Instruction for further information on dog releasing process.

Administering Medications to A Return Dog

If a dog requires medications, it will be noted on the Return Dog Chart. The times the medication(s) should be administered will be written on the Return Dog Form, and the medication(s) will be stapled onto the WHITE copy of the form. Veterinary technicians will be responsible for dispensing and tracking medications per the veterinarian's orders. Following the release of a dog from the ITC, it is the responsibility of its musher to continue the administration of prescribed medication(s).

Feeding Return Dogs

Return Dogs are to be offered food after the initial check by the veterinarian(s) to be sure that their appetites are not diminished. In addition, Return Dogs in Nome will be routinely fed at 08:00 and 20:00 hours with snacks at 12:00 and 16:00 hours. Usually, the feeding will consist of a frozen meat that has been soaked in hot water for approximately 30 minutes to make a "soup" which is then ladled over about two cups of kibble. Throughout the day the Return Dogs will receive "treats" of frozen fish, fat, or meat at the discretion of the veterinarian or lead handler.

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If a dog is not eating from the bowl, bring it to the attention of the veterinarian or lead handler. Sometimes sled dogs prefer eating right off the ground or need some extra coaxing with hand feeding. Canned food may also be available to tempt them. If these efforts do not encourage a dog to eat the normal amount, a veterinarian must be immediately informed.

Return Dog Locations Reporting

Lead Handler or Medical Team will update the dog log, ensuring its accuracy twice daily (10:00 and 22:00 hours).

Walking Return Dogs

As a rule, a Return Dog is not in our care for more than a day. However, in instances where 24 hours have passed, the Nome Lead Handler or a veterinarian may ask if any handlers want to walk the dog. Although a dog may have been discontinued from race participation, it does not mean it is not ready to run! These are extremely powerful animals. A slip lead must be used if the dog is not secured to the dropline, the leash handle must be looped around your wrist at all times. Any walking of any Return Dog must be cleared with the Nome Lead Handler.

Maintaining The Return Dog Area

It is important to keep the Return Dog area clear of any feces or debris. The only time feces should be left on the ground is if a dog is exhibiting diarrhea or has bloody stools, especially prior to being checked by a veterinarian upon arrival to the dog lot. Once the dogs have been checked, their areas should be always kept clean. It is not uncommon for the stools to be loose initially. The dogs have recently stopped racing and need to rest. If the problem continues, however, it should be brought to the Lead Handler/Technician/Veterinarian attention.

Following the release of a Return Dog to its musher, the straw and crate should be cleared from the space. The musher may take the straw if he/ she wants it.

Providing Well Being and Safety Checks for All Dogs in the Lot

Most of the time, there are not many Return Dogs in Nome. In those cases, you should work with the other Nome Dog Lot personnel in patrolling the dog lot, checking to be sure all the finisher dogs are safe, resting comfortably and have not slipped out of their collars. If at any time you notice any dog in the lot (not just the Return Dogs) exhibiting unusual behavior, raspy breathing, coughing, shivering, etc., notify the Nome Dog Lot Coordinator immediately. A veterinarian will be notified and will come out to the lot to examine the dog.

If it is exceptionally windy and you see a dog's straw has been blown away, add more. Check with the Nome Dog Lot Coordinator for additional straw if you see the musher does not have any extra in his/her area.

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There are dog coats and dog blankets available for Return Dogs. As the sun goes down, the dogs will benefit from extra cover. Some dogs do not tolerate the blankets and will shake them off. In those cases, piling some straw over them is an option. Monitor for any dogs who may be chewing on the blankets or coats and remove them immediately then inform the Nome Return Dog Coordinator.

As you patrol the dog lot, pick up any debris such as paper wrappers, twine, plastic bags, dog booties, any sharp objects, etc. that the dogs could either swallow or step on.

Other than the Return Dogs, do not clean up any feces surrounding the teams that have completed the race. Many mushers evaluate the stools to determine how their dogs are recovering.

Providing Security to the Dog Lot

Only dog lot volunteers, Return Dog personnel, mushers, their handlers, and ITC authorized individuals are allowed in the dog lot. There are **NO** exceptions. As a volunteer, you have the authority to ask for identification of anyone entering the lot that is questionable. If you feel uncomfortable doing that, alert another volunteer, the Nome Dog Lot or someone in the Mini Center office. Do not use force or get into a shouting match. If necessary, the Nome Police Department will be called to handle the situation.

It is also important that no stray dogs enter the dog lot. Try to coax them out. Should one come in contact with an Iditarod sled dog, do not get into the middle of them if a dog fight ensues. Call for help!

Loose Dog Proactive and Reactive Protocols

All aspects of the Return Dog Program are very important, as mushers are depending on us to provide the best possible care of their dogs in the process of transporting them from the trail to where they are picked up by a designated representative of their home kennel.

While under our care, it is imperative that no Return Dogs get loose, particularly when they depart from the premises at which they were Return. Even with our best efforts, however, this will occur on rare occasion. Detailed proactive and reactive protocols have been established for addressing the topic of loose dogs and are included in section 1 of this manual.

The Seppala Award

This is an award granted to a musher who shows exceptional dog care throughout the race. A percentage of the finishing teams will be scored in Nome when coming across the finishing line. The Return Dog Handlers and Technicians are often part of aiding in this scoring by trotting each dog on that team for the Seppala Veterinarians to watch and then examine. Handlers and technicians in Nome should be prepared to participate in helping the Seppala Veterinarians. Further instructions on this process will be available in Nome should you be asked to participate.

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SECTION 7: PROTOCOL FOR ANCHORAGE HANDLERS

READ SECTION 1 BEFORE READING THIS SECTION

As a volunteer for Iditarod Anchorage Return Dog, you will work as part of a team caring for Return Dogs that are flown in from the trail. Shift times vary based on estimated time of arrival of planes. Your responsibilities may include assisting with unloading dogs from airplanes, loading & unloading dogs from dog trucks, caring for dogs outside (feeding, laying straw, covering them with blankets, shoveling feces), assisting the veterinarians as dogs are examined, checking microchip numbers of the dogs with a reader and/or maintenance tasks such as filling water buckets, paperwork, washing dog bowls, computer dog log data entry, making phone calls, all while assuring the safety and security of the dogs.

This is a physical job. Loading & unloading dogs that potentially weigh 60-70 pounds is not for everyone. For each shift, the Return Dog Coordinator will select who is allowed to do this. Keep in mind, this is not personal. It is first and foremost about the safety and security of the dogs. The majority of time is spent caring for the dogs AFTER they are safely secured to a dropline. It is important to inform the Return Dog Coordinator verbally or in writing, if you are uncomfortable with any task.

The shifts will be anywhere from 6 - 12 hours long, with the second week often extending into the following morning. You will be working with 10 -13 other volunteers as well as 2-3 veterinarians and 1-2 veterinary technicians. Tasks are shared so everyone gets experience with everything. All work is coordinated by the Return Dog Coordinator and any concerns and questions need to be addressed to him/her.

Most of the work is outside, so dress appropriately. It can be warm and sunny, but often it is windy and cold. Dress in layers and bring an outer layer you don't mind getting 'doggie.' Outer work gloves with a tight thin warm inner glove work best. Bring a headlamp for evening work.

Our volunteer location is at the Iditarod Race Headquarters, Lakefront Hotel, 4800 Spenard Road, Anchorage. The Return Dog Facility (mobile trailer- Conex box) is located in the Lakefront Hotel rear parking lot. Check with the Return Dog Coordinator for your assigned shift.

One of our primary tasks is to help these dogs feel safe. When they are discontinued from race participation on the trail, their musher and teammates have left them behind. They are left with strangers to care for them, and by the time they reach us, they likely have already travelled through one of the major Hubs (McGrath or Unalakleet), where they were cared for by more unfamiliar personnel. Although their safety and well-being is a top priority, some will be afraid as a result of many new experiences. Take extra care in helping them feel safe and secure. Follow the lead of the experienced Return Dog Handlers.

Unloading Dogs From Airplanes

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Dogs arrive in Anchorage via either private Iditarod Air Force (IAF) ski planes on Lake Hood directly behind the Lakefront Hotel, IAF planes on wheels at one of several airstrips or by commercial cargo aircraft that land at Anchorage International Airport. All are within minutes of the Lakefront Hotel. The IAF flights, whether on skis or wheels, can carry up to 10 dogs. The commercial cargo flights can transport up to 80 dogs.

Approach an IAF airplane only when it is safely stopped, with propeller off, and after eye contact with the pilot has been made. The pilot will hand off a dog ONLY after you indicate you have a firm grip on the dog. A "firm grip" is defined as at least 2 fingers grasping from under the collar and the use of a choke leash. Dogs are walked safely to the Return Dog line and secured by snaps to the "D" rings on their collars. Dogs are spaced about 10 feet apart on the dropline. The process continues until all dogs are unloaded. Make sure that you do NOT attach a dog with both the Return Dog dropline (chain) and a Return Dog Cable, as the two could become twisted together causing ever increasing tightening around a dogs neck and potentially leading to strangulation. If a Return Dog Cable is on the dog, remove it and give it to the Return Dog Coordinator. Do NOT attach that to the Return Dog dropline!!

If unloading from a commercial cargo plane, dogs are handed off from an individual located at the cargo door to you, only after you have indicated that you have established a firm grip. They are then immediately loaded into a dog box on a dog truck. There should always be an individual at the dog truck to help load dogs into boxes and confirm that the box door is closed and latched.
The dogs are then driven to the Lakefront Hotel, unloaded and placed on line as explained above.

None of the above tasks are performed by anyone without approval and/or being assigned by the Return Dog Coordinator and in their absence, the Hub Lead Handler. Training for new volunteers will be provided if extra hands are needed.

RED, HIGH BLUE, LOW BLUE, & WHITE Tagged Dogs

Each return dog will be assigned a color to denote their medical status: "RED", "HIGH BLUE", "LOW BLUE", or "WHITE". A "RED" status indicates they may have a severe injury or life-threatening condition that requires the attention of a veterinarian immediately. RED-tagged dogs receive the highest priority level. Most often, the Return Dog Coordinator and Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical Care will already know that these dogs are coming. "HIGH BLUE" dogs are those that need medication and close medical attention, as they can be dogs that borderline on "RED" status. "LOW BLUE" dogs are those that need medication, but they are stable. "WHITE" dogs are healthy, but they are likely tired and need some rest. However, because medical conditions may change over time and distance, all dogs are examined by veterinarians after every flight, including their return to Anchorage.

When dogs are placed on the dropline, there will be designated areas for where "RED" and "High/LOW BLUE" dogs will be placed. Only "RED" and "HIGH Blue" dogs will actually have

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color RED or BLUE surveyor tape attached to their collars to indicate their medical status.

All Return Dogs must be accompanied by paperwork referred to as the "Return Dog Form." It is imperative that this form moves with the dog, as it contains the records of its medical status, examination and treatment history.

Lining The Dogs Out

Once the dogs are placed on the dropline, our task is to ensure the safety and security of dogs. There will always be at least one volunteer patrolling the line to keep unknown people away, to watch for loose dogs and to be sure that no dogs are taken by Local Contact persons without signed paperwork. After securing a dog to the Return Dog dropline, time is allowed for the dogs to get used to their new surroundings, stretch and take care of business. The temptation will be to shovel up the feces, but unless it is healthy and solid, it needs to be left for a veterinarian to see. Diarrhea, loose stools and blood in the stool are something veterinarians will want to see when doing their evaluations. Alert a veterinarian or veterinary technician if you see this.

Documenting Dog Microchip Numbers

We begin documenting the dogs' microchip numbers with a handheld reader. The purpose of this is to confirm their identities and to have a record of their order on the dropline. Two volunteers accomplish this as a team; one checks the dog collar tag number and letter and reads the microchip number, while the other notes numbers on a clipboard and moves down the line.

Veterinary Examinations

Once the dogs have had their identifications confirmed and their Return Dog Forms in order, veterinarians utilizing Return Dog Technicians and occasionally lay-volunteers as scribes, will perform their examinations. Veterinary technicians will assist with medication and more technical support. It is important to emphasize that each dog should be accompanied by a Return Dog Form which originated from the checkpoint at which the dog was discontinued from race participation. The forms contain medical notes from previous veterinary exams, as well as records of any treatments administered. Veterinarians will not start their exams without the Return Dog Form. While a veterinarian examines the dog, scribes will assist in making additional notes on that form. Veterinarians may sign, date and attach any additional necessary information at a later time. When the dog is released to their Local Contact person, a copy (top) of the Return Dog Form goes with each dog. The remaining copy stays in the Return Dog office for ITC documentation.

Dog Care

After the veterinarians have completed their examinations, feeding and bedding are provided. A notation should be recorded on the Return Dog Form for any dog that did not eat a regular scheduled meal.

Buckets of water are filled in the hotel. Dry food is measured into bowls and water is added. Each

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dog shall have its own bowl. For those with strong appetites, seconds and thirds are offered. Upon completion of the meal, dog bowls are picked up, stacked and washed later. If any dog doesn't eat, immediately inform the Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical Care, the Return Dog Coordinator.

Straw is then placed on the ground for the dogs to rest on. As dogs settle down, fleece blankets are available to lay over the dogs. Often, this is a time when some dogs may want to be rubbed or petted, but most will want to sleep or rest. It is important to monitor all dogs from this point and alert the medical team or Return Dog Coordinator if coughing, raspy breathing, shivering, diarrhea, vomiting or anything abnormal is noticed.

Loose Dog Proactive and Reactive Protocols

All aspects of the Return Dog Program are very important, as mushers are depending on us to provide the best possible care of their dogs in the process of transporting them from the trail to where they are picked up by a designated representative of their home kennel.

While under our care, it is imperative that no Return Dogs get loose, particularly when they depart from the premises at which they were Return. Even with our best efforts, however, this will occur on rare occasion. Detailed proactive and reactive protocols have been established for addressing the topic of loose dogs and are included in section 1 of this manual.

Removal of Return Dog GPS Tracker Units

Each “tracker unit” consists of a SPOT Trace tracker and its custom sewn nylon tracker sleeve (yellow in color and numbered), which is attached to a modified Return Dog collar separate from the dog’s primary racing collar. The primary function of the SPOT Trace trackers is to enhance our ability to locate loose dogs, particularly in the event that they leave the checkpoint premises.

Tracker units must be removed prior to releasing a Return Dog from the jurisdiction of the ITC. Immediately after removal, the number on the sleeve of the tracker unit and the dog tag number and letter must be reported to the Return Dog Coordinator. Also, removed tracker units will be handed over to the Return Dog Coordinator.

Releasing Dogs To Local Contact Persons

Dogs will only be released to their Local Contact persons after they come into the office trailer and sign the Return Dog Form. Once the dogs are released, they become the responsibility of their Local Contact. In cases where the dogs have been treated, follow-up calls are done by the veterinarians to assess their recovery. When a handler comes around to the back of the Lakefront Hotel, they ***must*** have a signed form for each dog to be able to pick them up.

The process starts again the next day with more Return Dogs. Keep in mind that we are subject to weather and there may be periods when airplanes are prohibited from flying. Idle times will occur, but

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all shifts must be staffed in case dogs fly in, since weather can change quickly. Most people will have at least two shifts, so they will have a chance to experience caring for the dogs. There is plenty of work to be done if dogs are not flying, including gear to clean, voicemails to check, trash to be picked up around the hotel area, etc. We are guests at the Lakefront Hotel and want to leave it better than when we got there. If you have any questions, please contact the Return Dog Coordinator.

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SECTION 8: RETURN DOG OVERVIEW FOR MUSHERS

READ SECTION 1 BEFORE READING THIS SECTION

Rule 45- Returned Dogs: All dogs that are returned from the Race must be left at a designated checkpoint with a completed and signed returned dog form. Any returned dog must be left with four (4) pounds of dog food.

- Before returning a dog, mushers must remove all gear (harness, booties, leggings, etc.) except for the dog collar. Dogs may be left with dog coats, but the coats will be removed for dog transit and will become property of Iditarod with no guarantee of return to the musher.
- Return dogs may be moved from the originating checkpoint to the closest dog collection area at Anchorage, McGrath, Unalakleet, or Nome. Dogs will then be collected from McGrath and Unalakleet and will be shipped to Anchorage for final review. These costs are covered by the ITC. However, dogs may be shipped from the collection areas to a location designated by the musher at the musher's expense.
- Dogs returned in Anchorage, Nome, and the re-start are the musher's responsibility

Musher Return Dog Protocol

A dog may be discontinued from race participation from your team for any reason, and at any checkpoint. Mushers must complete their part of the Return Dog Form before releasing a dog from competition. An explanation of their reason(s) for dropping is requested along with the musher's signature. An examination needs to be performed as soon as possible. It is not uncommon to identify conditions in addition to the ones listed as reasons for dropping. Space is provided for veterinarians to document previous relevant medications administered and current treatments, as well as their names, in the event that follow up verbal communications are needed.

The following list demonstrates the typical top five reasons for returning dogs during a long-distance race: Fatigue, Shoulder injuries, Carpal injuries, Foot lesions, and Diarrhea. Certainly, we must be prepared to address any abnormality, but statistically speaking, these are the ones with the greatest frequency. Remember, "Fatigue" may be a manifestation of some other underlying illness or injury, so please make sure that those dogs receive a thorough exam. The biggest concerns are pneumonia, gastric ulcers, and arrhythmias.

We will have staff veterinarians working with Return Dogs in Anchorage. They will be providing routine evaluations of all dogs as they return to Anchorage since a dog's medical status can change while in transit.

Return Dogs that are taken to Nome are transported by Iditarod personnel to the Nome Dog Lot and cared for there by Return Dog Handlers until their musher gets to Nome. Mushers are then responsible for the routine care of their Return Dogs, as well as for their transportation to the musher's home kennel.

While still at a checkpoint, mushers are asked to feed dogs that they plan on returning, but once you

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depart, the Return Dog personnel/veterinarians will take over. Return Dogs will be fed by ITC personnel at least three times daily at 08:00, 16:00 and 24:00 hours in the smaller checkpoints. Meal times for Return Dogs in Hubs are scheduled for 08:00 and 20:00 hours, with snacks given at 12:00 and 16:00.

In addition, locations of all Return Dogs will be entered into a central database twice daily, at 10:00 and 22:00 hours. One of the primary purposes of this effort will be to update mushers and their Local Contact persons, when requested, on locations of Return Dogs from their team. This database will be accessed by select ITC personnel only. Mushers will be able to obtain the most current updates on their Return Dog locations by talking with checkpoint communications personnel. Your Local Contact persons will be able to get the same information from the Return Dog Coordinator.

ITC personnel will have Return Dog Cables at checkpoints, but you are advised to carry appropriate numbers of those in your sled. Any Return Dog Cable must be of sufficient strength and dimensions to adequately attach a dog to the Return Dog dropline. Mushers are also asked to write your dogs' names on their collars for easy identification. Dogs experiencing medical conditions that adversely affect their ability to withstand the elements will be brought inside by staff veterinarians.

Return Dog Forms

Return Dog forms are in QUADRUPLICATE. Ultimately the top two copies follows the dog through the entire Return Dog Program with the top copy being given to the Musher local contact for review. Additional paperwork may accompany this if the dog needed more care than can feasibly fit and be conveyed on the Return Dog Form.

A "Condition Code" system has been developed for the Return Dog Forms, whereby illnesses are designated by four letters, and musculoskeletal injuries by three letters followed by L, R, LF, RF, LH or RH to indicate the appropriate anatomical location.

Also indicated on the Return Dog Form is the "Condition Status" box. As presented on the form, there are four designated conditions shown, including "RED", "HIGH BLUE", "LOW BLUE", and "WHITE." Dogs not in need of medications are officially considered to be "WHITE." Dogs with potentially life-threatening conditions are designated "RED" and are identified by RED flagging placed around the neck.

A "RED" collared dog is in need of air transportation to a medical facility in Anchorage ASAP. The Iditarod Air Force (IAF) will divert flights as needed to accomplish this. Obviously, we will do what is best for the dog in all situations. Veterinarians are instructed not to be casual about such designation due to the fact that a "RED" designation can dramatically impact flight schedules and staff movements on short notice.

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All other dogs that are being medicated have historically been classified as “Blue.” Obviously, the condition of dogs receiving medication, but not in need of critical (“RED”) care, may vary from very minor to more serious. We have for several years designated more serious “Blue” dogs, i.e., pneumonia, myopathy or gastric ulcer suspects, requiring very close monitoring, as “HIGH BLUE.” The others are then “LOW BLUE,” showing they are stable but taking medication. These categories are on the Return Dog Form.

Mushers should write the dogs’ names on the dog collars for easy identification. Make sure the collars and cable snaps are secure before handing a dog to the Veterinarians. Dogs experiencing medical conditions that adversely affect their ability to withstand the elements are housed inside. All dogs must be observed at least every two hours, and more frequently in inclement weather conditions. Vital taking frequency and treatments will depend on the severity of the illness/injury.

All Return Dogs are monitored and cared for at the checkpoint until travel can be arranged. If a dog is considered to be a “RED” or “HIGH BLUE,” the Chief Veterinarian will be contacted immediately to discuss the case and start the process of transporting this dog back to Anchorage ASAP.

Return Dog Locations Reporting

Communications personnel at all checkpoints will report Return Dogs at their locations to a digital dog log at 10:00 and 22:00 hours. Information entered into the Return Dog dog log includes tag numbers, color medical status, GPS tracker number, and condition code.

Return Dog GPS tracker units will be placed on Return Dogs at their checkpoint of origin. Each “tracker unit” consists of a numbered SPOT Trace tracker and its custom sewn nylon tracker sleeve (yellow in color and numbered), which is attached to a modified Return Dog collar (Velcro construction) separate from and behind the dog’s primary racing collar. The primary function of the SPOT Trace trackers is to enhance our ability to locate loose dogs, particularly if they leave the checkpoint premises. These will be removed by the Return Dog Team in Anchorage once they have been medically cleared and released from ITC possession.

Anchorage Return Dog Veterinary Care

Under the direction of the Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical Care, veterinarians will be stationed at ITC headquarters (Lakefront Hotel). Those chosen to serve in this role are delegated by the Chief Veterinarian with the responsibility of making appropriate decisions in regard to the treatment needs of Return Dogs, soon after their arrival in Anchorage.

Anchorage Return Dog Veterinarian duties will include the evaluation of all Return Dogs. The condition of a dog can change for the better or worse between the time it is discontinued from race participation and when it arrives in Anchorage. Appropriate care of Return Dogs is an important aspect of our roles as stewards of these animals. Every effort will be made by the ITC and the veterinary staff to achieve the best medical outcome, while attempting to minimize costs to mushers.

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Most Return Dogs are assessed, receive basic treatment when needed and are then released to a musher's Local Contact person by Return Dog volunteers, at no charge to the musher.

Dogs that are medically stable and able to be released will be discharged to the musher's Local Contact person. Pick up / release ***MUST*** occur the same day as their arrival in Anchorage as there is no place to house the dogs securely in Anchorage. The Return Dog Coordinator and his/her team will make effort to notify your local handler in an appropriate time to be able to come to the hotel for release. That being said, we are often beholden to weather and flight delays, so the Return Dog Coordinator will do their best to time things to be the least burdensome for your local contact.

Any dog that has a condition requiring non-emergency medical care during normal business hours will either be transported by either ITC personnel to the veterinary facility so designated by the musher on their completed Dog Care Agreement Form or discharged to the musher's Local Contact person for transportation to said facility. The decision for their need to seek further care at another facility will be based on the clinical assessments performed by the Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical Care. In the event that non-emergency treatment needs to be provided on an after-hours basis, our veterinarians will have the option of using the Return Dog Facility (mobile trailer) at the Lakefront Hotel.

Local Contact Persons

It is ***IMPERATIVE*** that those selected as Local Contact persons for your Return Dogs, are easily accessed, readily available and sufficiently knowledgeable about basic dog care. Please advise them to pick up the Return Dog within 2-4 hours of notification by Anchorage Return Dog personnel that the dog is ready for pickup. Pick up / release ***MUST*** occur the same day as their arrival in Anchorage as there is no place to house the dogs securely in Anchorage. Mushers should double check names and phone numbers of their Local Contacts to ensure that Return Dog volunteers can easily reach them. The more information that we have, the more quickly we will be able to release dogs following their clearance by the Return Dog Veterinarians. More information on this will be provided to the Musher when they are filling out the Dog Care Agreement.

Return Dog Policy For Serious/Critical Care Scenarios

A very small number of Return Dogs may require hospitalization in an emergency facility (PET Emergency). The following are potential reasons: serious/critical conditions needing prompt treatment upon arrival in Anchorage on an after-hours basis and/or serious/critical conditions requiring 24-hour monitoring and treatment.

The condition of a dog can change for the better or worse between the time it is discontinued from race participation and when it reaches Anchorage. All Return Dogs are examined by Return Dog Veterinarians upon their arrival in Anchorage. The decision to send a dog to PET Emergency will be made by the Chief Veterinarian and/or Veterinarian in Charge of Return Dog Medical Care. Reasonable efforts are made to inform mushers of situations where hospitalization at PET Emergency is needed. As

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stated in rule 41, financial responsibility for dog care shall be borne by the musher. Please budget for this possible scenario.

Return Dog Paperwork

As previously discussed, all dogs in Return Dog will have a Return Dog Form showing their care provided throughout the program. This form will need to be signed by your local contact in Anchorage (or yourself in Nome for the few dogs that may go there when returned at Elim, White Mountain, or Safety) when taking over care of your dog. Some Return Dog Forms may be accompanied by additional medical information in the form of a Discharge Instructions Form. This is common for dogs requiring follow-up or closer monitoring/treatment. If you have any questions, please direct them to any of the Return Do Veterinarians or Chief Veterinarian. A sample of this Medical Discharge is found in Appendix 1.

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APPENDIX 1: Medical Discharge Instructions Form

IDITAROD - RETURN DOG DISCHARGE INSTRUCTIONS

Date/Time _____

Musher Name _____

Dog's Name_____ Dog ID Tag Number_____

Your Dog has received medical evaluation and treatment from the Iditarod Return Dog Veterinary Team. Your dog is deemed injured/sick enough to warrant these further discharge instructions in addition to his/her ITC Return Dog form. If you have any questions regarding medical care, please call: 907-248-MUSH (6874) where you can be connected to one of the Anchorage Iditarod veterinarians.

1. Working Diagnosis:

2. Medications: ☐ No medications dispensed OR ☐ We are dispensing the below medication

Medication 1_____ # pills dispensed_____ Give with food? _____

Instructions: _____ Next dose due_____

Medication 2_____ # pills dispensed_____ Give with food? _____

Instructions: _____ Next dose due_____

Medication 3 _____ # pills dispensed_____ Give with food? _____

Instructions: _____ Next dose due_____

3. Further notes: _____

_____

4. Recheck: _____ This patient ***does*** need further care and recheck at Musher's local designated vet clinic in _____days.

_____ New medications or refill of medications will be needed. Diagnostic testing may be warranted.

Local designated Vet Clinic (name/address/phone): _____

_____

Please recheck with local veterinarian clinic immediately if you note any of the following signs:

- labored breathing	*- vomiting or persistent diarrhea*	*- being painful*
- new or persistent cough	*- not eating/not drinking*	*- not returning to normal*
- congestion or nasal discharge	*- new or progressive limp*	*- other:* _____

Veterinarian name: _____ Date/Time: _____

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