

Choosing a Boarding Facility

We understand that boarding your animals can be a high stress experience for both you and your pets. Choosing the right boarding kennel is imperative to ensure that you are able to enjoy your vacation and not have to worry about your pets. This handout is designed to help you address some of the common questions and concerns that you might have when choosing a boarding facility.

Q: What vaccines do my animals need to board?

A: Every boarding facility will have different vaccination requirements, but a general guideline is that your dog should be current on his rabies, distemper, parvovirus and especially bordatella vaccines at the time of boarding. With regards to cats, most boarding facilities require that they be up to date on their herpes virus, calici virus, panleukopenia and rabies vaccines. To ensure the health and safety of your pet while boarding, kennels with strict vaccine requirements should be considered first when choosing a boarding facility.

Q: Should I visit the boarding facility before bringing my pet there?

A: Yes. Visiting the boarding facility will help you picture where your animal will be housed. Speaking with the boarding facility staff can help you answer your specific questions and alleviate any personal concerns you may have.

Q: How do I know a good boarding facility when I see one?

A: Make sure that a boarding facility has a strict vaccine policy. If you are unsure if the policy is correct, check with your veterinarian. There are other questions to ask. What kind of veterinary support is available? Is the facility certified by the American Boarding Kennels Association? Does the facility look and smell clean? Is there good ventilation? Is the staff courteous and respectful to the animals there? What other services does the boarding facility have to offer? You can also check with the Better Business Bureau in your area. These questions will help you decide if the boarding facility that you're visiting is right for you.

Q: What if my pet has special medical needs?

A: You may want to consider choosing a boarding facility that's within a veterinary hospital, or a boarding facility that has a veterinarian on staff. You should be prepared to bring your pet's medication in their original bottles with written direction as to the time and dose for each medication. You should also alert the staff as to when your pet has had his or her last dose. This will ensure that your pet's medical needs are met.

Q: How is boarding going to affect my pet?

A: Stress is the number one behavioral change encountered in a boarding situation. While vacation can be relaxing for the owner, vacation at a boarding facility can be stressful for the pet. Some of the reasons why boarding facilities can be stressful include: being away from their owner, a sudden change in diet, a sudden change in daily routine, lack of familiar items; and lack of familiar comforts. A good boarding facility will be aware of the potential effects on your pet, and will be prepared to minimize them as much as possible.

Q: So what else can I do to alleviate my pet's anxiety while I'm away?

A: If your pet is not used to boarding, try to take them for a short visit before leaving for a longer time. This can help your pet acclimate to the new environment. When saying goodbye to your pet, try to make it brief, a long goodbye can upset your pet unnecessarily. If you find a boarding facility that you like, keep going back there. Your pet will become accustomed to the staff there, and this can help alleviate some stress. Other things you can do include bringing some of their pet food from home, or bringing some of their own toys and blankets. This will give your pet a sense of home and some added security in the foreign boarding environment.

Q: I have multiple pets. Should I board them together or separately?

A: If your pets are good together and don't tend to fight when in close quarters, then boarding them together may give both a sense of security and familiarity while at the boarding facility. If your dogs tend to play rough, or if you have any doubts about their behavior together, you should board them separately. If boarding two pets together is not an option at the boarding facility of your choice, ask about group play time, so at least your pets (primarily dogs) can be together for some of the day. You can also ask about having kennels where the pets can see each other if they cannot be together all the time.

Q: How is my pet going to behave after coming home from being boarded?

A: It is not uncommon for your pet to be quite excited upon returning home. You might also see a continuation of stress behaviors your pet may have demonstrated during boarding. These behaviors can include: excessive whining, barking and/or meowing, digging and chewing. He may try to eat his dinner too quickly, or he may not have much of an appetite at all. It could take a couple of days for your dog to get back on his or her normal routine with you. If your pet does not return to their normal behavior within a couple of days, you should consult your veterinarian.

Finding a boarding facility where you feel comfortable leaving your pets is very important to both your animals well being and your own. While there are several personal considerations that factor into this decision, it is also imperative that the facility you choose has strict vaccine requirements, sanitary and appropriately structured kennels, and a considerate and competent staff. Always feel free to discuss any medical or personal pet concerns with your veterinarian before you choose a facility. They can be very helpful in giving you additional tips to help alleviate the stress of boarding your animal.

*Handout created as part of a class exercise by veterinary students:
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Clinical Animal Behavior Service

www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/vmth/small_animal/behavior