

RELOCATION OF DOGS & CATS FOR ADOPTION



BEST
PRACTICES



Animal sheltering facilities may be involved in transport of animals locally, regionally or internationally. “Animal transport” is typically used to describe programs in which animals are transferred over some distance from one organization or individual to another. However, the recommendations in this document should apply regardless of the purpose, distances or parties involved, as careful management and planning are always required to ensure an animal's comfort and safety and to minimize the risk of disease transmission. For many animals, relocation is a life-saving measure, but it may also pose risks. Animal transport programs have the potential to spread infectious diseases along animal transport corridors and to new destinations. The stress of transport may increase susceptibility to infection or increase viral shedding. The risk of exposure to infectious disease is increased when animals from multiple sources are transported together. In addition to affecting individual animals, transportation programs may impact animals at the source and destination in both positive and negative ways. Therefore, risks and benefits for all animals affected by a transport program must be carefully considered. Careful planning minimizes risks and well-planned transport programs can be very successful.

This document is not intended to address disaster situations; however, a best practices document is available from the National Alliance of State Animal and Agricultural Emergency Programs (NASAAEP) that addresses emergency evacuation and transport.

While responsible relocation of dogs and cats for adoption can facilitate the placement of these animals into good homes, relocation should not be viewed as a substitute for appropriate and effective animal control policies enacted and enforced by local governments.

Reasons for relocating adoptable pets

A real or perceived shortage of a certain type of dog or cat available for adoption in one locale creates a demand for puppies, kittens, dogs, and cats that may outstrip the local supply. In some situations, shortages may be the result of successful spay and neuter efforts intended to reduce the unwanted dog and cat population resulting in fewer adoptable animals in the community. In other cases, puppies, kittens, dogs, or cats may be locally available, but good communication or transportation is the missing link that would get the animals from under-resourced shelters or municipal facilities (pounds) to locations where adoptions can occur. Sometimes the types of dogs available for adoption (e.g., large dogs; energetic, poorly trained adolescent dogs) do not fit the profile that adoptive families are seeking, and kittens are often more in demand than senior cats.

Shelters that relocate dogs and cats can benefit from an increased live release rate and reduction in the number of animals they euthanize due to local overpopulation. In addition, this can free up valuable resources (money and staff) to allow improved care for dogs and cats left behind in the shelter, and permit more spay and neuter outreach efforts to assist in addressing local overpopulation issues.

Methods of relocation

In addition to shelter-to-shelter relocations, other programs have emerged that move dogs and cats around the United States and outside its borders. These range from informal, grassroots efforts by well-intentioned individuals, to commercial operations that profit from the sale of animals under the semblance of adoption. Animals may be moved by road using commercial animal transporters or by volunteers driving privately owned vehicles, and some travel by air. Currently there is no system in place to track the number of dogs and cats being relocated for adoption purposes.

In all circumstances, humane care must be provided for every animal being transported. Public health and safety must be primary concerns, and all participants in the relocation process must abide by all local, state, and federal regulations.

Selection of dogs and cats for relocation

Programs that carefully screen puppies, kittens, dogs, and cats for infectious diseases and aggressive behavior at their origin, as well as provide vaccinations, treatment and prevention for parasitic infestations and necessary medical treatment before animals are allowed to travel are to be commended. Good programs do not transport dogs and cats that pose a risk of transmitting infectious diseases to the destination facility or those that pose a public health risk because of aggression or zoonotic disease. In addition, responsible programs do not transport dogs and cats if those animals' welfare will likely suffer during the process (e.g., near-term pregnant animals, injured or arthritic animals, particularly anxious animals). Well-run programs also reclaim animals for re-homing if the original placement does not succeed, and will work with adopters if infectious diseases or behavioral problems emerge soon after relocation.

Choosing which dogs and cats to transport can be complex. For example, selecting dogs based on lowest risk for heartworm disease (e.g., 8 weeks of age and already receiving heartworm prevention) may be at odds with choosing dogs that are safest to transport when considering viral diseases. Puppies and kittens may be more resilient to the emotional stressors of transport and therefore seemingly the best candidates, but they are the most immunologically naïve and at risk for infectious disease transmission.



Responsibilities of Participating Individuals and Organizations

- Clear, direct communication is essential among those involved in any transport program.
- Written guidelines that all parties can agree to should be developed.
- Guidelines should address medical and behavioral selection criteria, as well as transportation and destination requirements.
- A written record of all involved parties, including responsibilities for each, should be kept in sufficient detail so that an animal can always be traced back to its origin.
- A contact person must be identified at each transfer point.
- For interstate transport, current rabies vaccination is an import requirement for dogs in all states within the United States. Legal requirements for cats vary by state; in states that do not expressly require vaccination, it is important to recognize that local ordinances may apply. More information on rabies vaccination requirements can be found on the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) website. To ensure the most up-to-date information is being accessed, transporters and attending veterinarians are encouraged to contact state regulatory authorities directly.
- A valid Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (health certificate) is also required by most states.

- Transporters must be familiar with the import requirements for all destinations, which, in the United States, are usually regulated by the Departments of Agriculture and/or Health in each state.
- Many airlines have specific requirements for transporting animals and information can be found at the Airlines for America website.

Responsibilities at the Point of Origin

- The originating shelter should have a comprehensive preventive healthcare program. Animals destined for transport must be vaccinated prior to or upon intake and should be treated for internal and external parasites.
- To ensure they do not further contribute to the problem of unwanted companion animals, animals to be relocated should be spayed or neutered, unless medically contraindicated, and fully recovered from those procedures before transport.
- In addition to any examinations required by state or federal transportation regulations, all animals being transported should receive a medical examination within 24 hours of transport.
- The animal's health and behavior status should be accurately described and communicated.
- Health records, health certificate, rabies certificate and a copy of the shelter record should accompany each animal.

- Animals should be identified by a collar, tag, tattoo, microchip, or any combination of these methods.
- To minimize the risk of infectious disease and optimize welfare, animals should be in good health at the time of transport. Transportation of ill animals may be justified in some cases when life-saving resources, such as medical care and placement opportunities, are available at the destination and when measures can be taken during transport to provide for their comfort, health, and safety.
- All dogs should be tested for heartworm disease prior to transport.
- All dogs should be started on macrocyclic lactone therapy prior to transport.
- The American Heartworm Society recommends that dogs with positive results of a heartworm test be started on doxycycline therapy prior to transport. Dogs with negative results of a heartworm test should be retested for heartworm disease six months after relocation, and adopters should be counseled that a negative heartworm test at the time of adoption does not ensure that the dog is free of heartworm disease.

Responsibilities During Road Transport

Vehicles

- Vehicles must, at minimum, be operated under compliance with federal or local statutes, recognizing that these regulations may not be sufficient to ensure animal safety and welfare.

- The Animal Welfare Act and Regulations include information on upper and lower ambient temperatures during transport and state that temperatures should not fall below 45°F for more than 4 consecutive hours. However a limit of 60°F (15.5°C) may be more suitable for some animals, especially animals with short hair coats, pediatric and elderly animals, those not acclimated to cooler temperatures, or those otherwise vulnerable. Temperatures should be kept below 80°F (26.6°C) with a relative humidity between 30 and 70%. Special precautions may be required for transporting brachycephalic (short-nosed) breeds of dogs and cats
- A thermometer should be placed in the animal area of the vehicle at animal level and where it is easily visible.
- Fresh air that is free of vehicle exhaust fumes must be ensured.
- The vehicle, including the cargo space, should be heated and cooled when necessary to allow animals to thermoregulate normally.
- Placing unconfined or tethered animals in the back of an open pickup truck for transport is unacceptable and illegal in many jurisdictions.
- Particular attention must be paid to provision of shade, as the temperature in a vehicle parked in full sun can rapidly become too high, even when outdoor temperatures are comfortable.

Enclosure Space During Transport

- Animals must be provided with adequate space, a comfortable environment, and good air quality.
- Cats should be provided a place to hide during transport as this is an important coping mechanism during stressful situations.
- Primary enclosures must be large enough for animals to stand and sit upright, to turn around freely while standing, and to lie in a natural position.
- If more than one animal is in the primary enclosure, there must be enough space for each occupant to lie down comfortably at the same time.
- Unfamiliar animals must not be transported together in the same primary enclosure.
- Crates and cages must not be stacked upon each other in a manner that increases animal stress and discomfort, compromises ventilation, allows waste material to fall from the cage above into the cage below, interferes with care and observation, or hinders emergency removal.

Enclosure design

- The enclosure must be sturdy and permit adequate ventilation.
- There should be no sharp edges.
- Flooring must prevent injury, discomfort, and leakage of fluids.
- Absorbent bedding should be provided.

- Animals must be safely and securely confined within the enclosure.
 - o Doors on primary enclosures must be secured to prevent accidental opening.
 - o Primary enclosures must be secured to prevent movement within the vehicle during transport.
- Each primary enclosure must be positioned in the animal cargo space in a manner that provides protection from the weather and extremes of temperature.
- Cats should, whenever possible, be transported in a separate compartment from dogs.

Responsibilities of the Transporter

- The vehicle driver or animal attendant must have sufficient training in animal health, welfare and safety to recognize and respond to animal needs during transport.
- Although no federal regulations exist to limit the distance of travel for companion animals, risk to animal health and welfare are recognized to increase with the length of the journey for other species.
- USDA/APHIS regulations for licensed transporters require the driver or animal attendant to observe dogs and cats as often as circumstances allow, but not less than once every 4 hours. Regular observation allows dogs to be appropriately fed and watered and the transport area to be cleaned. In addition, adult dogs should be provided with the opportunity to exercise and eliminate every 4 to 6 hours.

- Maximum transport time to an intermediate or final destination shelter should be no more than 12 hours.
- Animals should not be left unattended when it may be detrimental to their health and safety.
- Food must be provided at least every 24 hours for adults and more frequently for animals younger than 6 months of age.
- Caregivers are charged with providing for the individual nutritional needs of the animals. Requirements for food and water may be increased during transport, compared to normal nutritional needs.
- If water is not available at all times it must be provided during observation/exercise stops (every 4-6 hours).
- Animal enclosures must be cleaned and any bedding replaced as often as necessary to prevent soiling of the animals. If it becomes necessary to remove the animals from their enclosures in order to clean, safeguards must be in place to ensure animal safety and prevent escape.
- During road transport, drivers should avoid sudden acceleration and deceleration, or excessive lateral movement (cornering), noise or vibration unless unexpected and unavoidable human safety or road conditions dictate otherwise.

- Animals should not be sedated unless recommended by a veterinarian because this can make them more vulnerable to hypothermia, dehydration, and injury. If animals are sedated, veterinary guidance must be provided for their care.
- Use of facial pheromones may be helpful to calm cats during stressful situations, and dog appeasing pheromones may be helpful to calm dogs.

Responsibilities at the Destination

- Points of destination must have sufficient trained personnel ready to receive and evaluate animals upon arrival.
- Each animal should receive a documented physical examination at the time of arrival.
- Veterinary services should be available on arrival for any animal requiring care.
- The facility must have adequate housing prepared for the arriving animals.
- The need for isolation or quarantine of arriving animals should be determined based on legal requirements, their health status, source, and infectious disease risk, with due attention to incubation periods for pathogens of concern and detrimental effects of increasing length of stay in the shelter.

Special Precautions for Young Animals

- Extra care must be provided when transporting puppies and kittens including:
 - o Prevention of exposure to temperature extremes
 - o Maintenance of adequate hydration and nutrition
 - o Protection from infectious disease exposure.
 - o Unless orphaned, kittens or puppies younger than 8 weeks old should be transported with the mother in a space large enough for her to lie down on her side with legs extended for comfort and to facilitate nursing.

NOTE: Transporting animals younger than 8 weeks old across state lines is prohibited by some state laws.

Special Precautions for Brachycephalic (Short-Nosed) Breeds of Dogs

- Department of Transportation statistics indicate that short-nosed breeds of dogs are more likely to die during air transport than dogs with normal-length muzzles and similar risks are likely during road transportation. This is thought to be related to respiratory problems that are exacerbated by stress and difficulty with thermoregulation, so caution should be exercised when transporting these animals during warm weather. More details can be found by reviewing the AVMA's FAQ for air transport of brachycephalic dogs and cats.

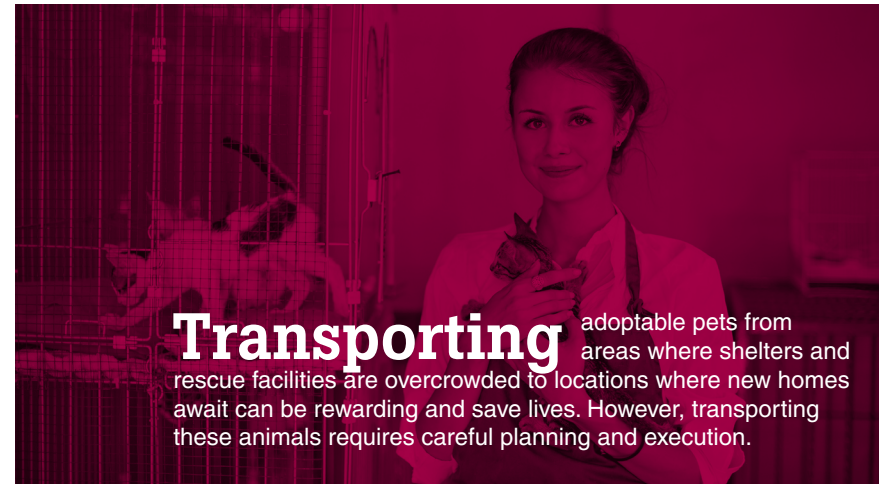
Special Considerations for Cats

- Cats should, whenever possible, be transported in a separate compartment from dogs.
- Cats should be provided a place to hide during transport as this is an important coping mechanism during stressful situations.
- Acclimating cats to their transport cage or carrier prior to travel may reduce the stress of the journey.

Special Precautions for the Transport of "Special Needs" Dogs and Cats

Animals that are compromised or debilitated can be transported if precautions are taken. Animals in this category may include pregnant bitches and queens, senior pets and animals recovering from surgery or illness.

- Ideally these animals would be transported only short distances if travelling by road.
- Ideally these animals would be transported by private airline or in the cabin of a commercial airline if travelling longer distances.
- If an animal has an infectious and easily transmissible disease, it should either not be transported until healthy or, if it must be transported, travel alone and be isolated at the destination. In addition, the state veterinarian in the state of receipt should be advised of the condition of the animal being transported and its final destination, and his/her guidance sought.



Transporting adoptable pets from areas where shelters and rescue facilities are overcrowded to locations where new homes await can be rewarding and save lives. However, transporting these animals requires careful planning and execution.

References and Additional Resources

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*Photo courtesy of Ben Swan,
The Santa Fe Animal Shelter
& Humane Society*



For more information on other best
practices that promote animals'
good welfare, please visit
www.avma.org/animalwelfare.