

Choosing a boarding kennel



It would probably be less traumatic for most dogs to be looked after by an experienced and reliable 'pet sitter'. Pet sitters are individuals who come to your home and stay there when you are away. They look after your dog in his or her normal environment. The majority of dog owners, however, have to rely on boarding kennels. Pet sitters are more expensive and some people may have concerns about relative strangers in their home. Taking care when choosing a boarding kennel can minimise stress for your dog, ensuring that they return home fit, healthy and happy.

Are boarding kennels inspected by any regulatory body?

In most developed countries there is some regulation of facilities that house pets for boarding. In the UK, boarding kennels have to be licensed by the local Council and the license must be on display. To maintain this license, kennels are inspected once a year and a veterinary inspection may also be required. Licensed kennels have to comply with regulations relating to pen size, hygiene, feeding and general standards of care. However, this license relates only to a *minimum* standard of care. It should not be used as the sole basis on which to select a kennel.

How do I know if a boarding kennel is a good one?

The best way to find out about a kennel is by personal recommendation from a satisfied previous user. Ask your dog-owning friends for recommendations. If they have had a good experience, then hopefully so will you and your dog.

Can I visit the kennels before booking my dog in to stay?

All good kennels encourage visits from prospective clients. This allows you to meet the owner and discuss your pet's requirements as well as see for yourself the standards of care and welfare. It is a good idea to visit the kennels without an appointment but during normal opening hours. If you have no experience of kennels, visit two or three before you make a decision.

What should I look for in a boarding kennel?

Overall cleanliness of the premises is a good start. The enclosures should be secure (to prevent animals escaping) and individual kennels should be separated by solid barriers to prevent spread of disease. Are the kennels draught-free? Are water bowls clean and full? Do all dogs have access to a secure run and covered area? Do the dogs already in the kennels look happy and contented?

Ask lots of questions. The staff should be happy to answer them and it is a good sign if they ask questions about your pet's particular requirements. Find out how many kennel staff are employed and how much time they get to spend with each animal. One of the most important factors in providing a happy stay for a dog is the staff's relationship with the pets under their care. Dogs are highly social animals and depend upon human company. It should be clear that the staff love dogs and have time to play with and groom the boarders.

Ask if there is temperature control for sleeping areas. Heating is essential in winter for pets that have been kept indoors. Air conditioning might be needed in summer. Also ask about exercise - is there somewhere the dogs can run free off the lead? If not, they should be walked several times a day.

Could my dog catch diseases from other dogs in kennels?

There is always increased risk of infectious disease when dogs or any other animals are kept together in close proximity. The risk is minimised by ensuring that your dog is up-to-date with routine vaccinations and that your pet is healthy on entering kennels. Good kennels will enforce vaccination requirements strictly and will require the documentary evidence of an up-to-date vaccination card. Usually, all residents must be vaccinated against all the common and serious preventable dog diseases: distemper, parvovirus, hepatitis and leptospirosis. Kennel cough, though not usually a 'killer' disease, is often added to this list.

Ask your vet if you are not sure what vaccinations your pet has received. Kennel cough vaccination (given by dropping vaccine fluid into your dog's nose) does not provide protection for a long period. Vaccination should therefore be given close to the time of admission to kennels. About a month beforehand is ideal. It

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is also a good idea to make sure your pet is protected against fleas during their stay. Seek advice from your veterinary surgeon and, if you are in any doubt, arrange a general health check for your dog.

All kennels will be registered with a local veterinary practice in case dogs become unwell whilst boarding. If your own veterinary practice is nearby, you can ask that your pet is seen by your own vet if there are problems. Make sure you let your vet know when your dog will be in kennels and that all contact details are correct.

My pet needs medication - can he still go into kennels?

Many kennels will be happy to care for your pet if he is in general good health but requires regular routine medication, eg pain killers for arthritis or even insulin injections for diabetes. This should be discussed in detail beforehand with your vet and the kennels. For high-dependency animals, your vet may be able to make boarding arrangements within the veterinary clinic or hospital to reduce worries about serious problems developing while you are away.

How can I make my pet's stay as pleasant as possible?

Try to choose boarding kennels that are close by. If you go away frequently, always use the same kennels. Your dog will become familiar with the surroundings and may even get to know the staff. You could conduct a short trial and put your dog in the kennels for a brief period, eg over a weekend, to see how he or she gets on, before committing to a longer stay. Remember to book for holiday periods well in advance; popular kennels get booked up early. Take your dog's own bedding and also a favourite toy from home. Most dogs settle well into kennels and soon make friends with other dogs or staff. If you have more than one dog, then most boarding kennels will be able to provide slightly larger pens so that they can remain together.

If you want any other information on health issues concerning your dog please contact Unicorn Vets on 023 8034 3434 and we will be happy to advise you.