

Plane Talk: Traveling with Animals

Over two million pets and other live animals are transported by air every year in the United States. Federal and state governments impose restrictions on transporting live animals. In addition, each airline establishes its own company policy for the proper handling of the animals they transport. As a shipper or owner, you also have a responsibility to take the necessary precautions to ensure the well-being of the animal you ship.

Animal Welfare Act

The federal Animal Welfare Act is enforced by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Here are several of the more important requirements.

- Dogs and cats must be at least eight weeks old and must have been weaned for at least five days. Cages and other shipping containers must meet the minimum standard for size, ventilation, strength, sanitation and design for safe handling.
- Dogs and cats must not be brought to the airline for shipping more than four hours before departure. (Six hours is permitted if shipping arrangements are made in advance.)
- If puppies or kittens less than 16 weeks of age are in transit more than 12 hours, food and water must be provided.
- Older animals must have food at least every 24 hours and water at least every 12 hours. Written instructions for food and water must accompany all animals shipped regardless of the scheduled time in transit.
- Animals may not be exposed to temperatures less than 45°F unless they are accompanied by a certificate signed by a veterinarian stating that they are acclimated to lower temperatures.
- See the U.S. Department of Agriculture's website "Pet Travel" at <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/pet-travel>.

Tips for Pet Owners

In addition to compliance with federal regulations and airline company policy, there are several precautions the owner/shipper can take to ensure the welfare of a shipped pet.

- Before traveling, accustom your pet to the kennel in which it will be shipped. Make sure that the door latches securely.
- Do not give your pet solid food in the six hours prior to the flight, although a moderate amount of water and a walk before and after the flight are advised.
- Do not administer sedation to your pet without the approval of a veterinarian, and provide a test dose before the trip to gauge how the pet will react.
- Be sure to reserve a space for your pet in advance, and inquire about time and location for drop-off and pick-up.
- For overseas travel (including Hawaii), inquire about any special health requirements such as quarantine.
- Write your name, address and phone number on the kennel, and make sure your pet is wearing a tag with the same information. Consider purchasing a temporary tag showing your destination address and phone number. Bring a photo of your pet, in case it is lost.
- With careful planning, your pet will arrive safely at its destination.