How to Choose a Boarding Facility for Your Dog

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Many times people will go on a vacation, a business trip, or have a family emergency and need to find someone to care for their pet(s). It is not always as easy as just taking the pet to a family member's home or having a neighbor drop in. There are several other possibilities when you need someone to care for your pet including:

Veterinary clinics

Some veterinary clinics will board clients' dogs. This may be an ideal situation, especially if your dog has a certain medical condition, such as diabetes, that requires medication. You may wish to ask some of the same questions as listed below under 'Boarding kennels.'

Dog sitters

In some areas, pet sitters are available. They are people that either stay at your house while you are gone or stop in during the day to care for your dog. Have the prospective sitter come to your home for an interview, and consider:

- How do they relate to the pet(s)?
- If they cannot stay at the house, how frequently can they come (3 times a day or more depending upon the health status of your dog), and when?
- Will they perform other household tasks such as taking in the mail and paper?
- Are they willing, and do they know how, to give medications?
- Will they be able to perform the necessary tasks such as walking the dog, etc?
- How much experience do they have, and do they have references?
- Are they acquainted with the veterinarians and the emergency clinic(s) in the area?
- How do they answer questions you may pose such as, What would you do if the dog vomits frequently?

Boarding kennels

Boarding kennels may be at someone's home or at a separate business location. Make an appointment and have a tour of the facility and talk with the staff. Find out:

- What are the sizes of the kennels or runs? Do they have solid partitions between them? Are there both indoor and outdoor facilities?
- How frequently, where, and for how long are the dogs walked?
- Are the kennels, runs, and exercise areas clean and free from excrement? Does the kennel or exercise area smell?
- How often are the kennels, dishes cleaned, and with what? How are the kennels cleaned between boarders?
- Will they bathe your dog if he becomes soiled with urine or excrement?
- What is the regular feeding schedule, and can it be adapted if your dog has special needs? Can you bring the dog's regular food?
- Who actually works with the animals?
- What are their admit and pick up hours? What if your return is delayed?
- Which vaccinations are required, and which are recommended? Are vaccinations that you administered acceptable or do they need to be given by a veterinarian?
- Is there a veterinarian or emergency clinic nearby?
- Is there a time you can call to check on how your dog is doing?
- What are their security provisions? Do the kennels and cages have good latches? Are the fences to the outdoor runs at least 6 feet high?
- Is the facility accredited by the American Boarding Kennels Association?

Conclusion

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As with finding other providers, ask your veterinarian, family, and friends for their recommendations when choosing a boarding facility. Regardless of the boarding facility/sitter you decide on, make reservations far in advance, if possible. Many facilities are fully booked four to six months in advance for times such as Christmas or spring break. If you are taking your dog away from home for boarding, ask if you can bring a dog bed, toys, or your sweatshirt to put in with the pet. This may make the time away from home less stressful for your pet. Knowing your dog is in good hands and being well-cared for will make your trip less stressful for you.

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