

TIPS FOR SAFE AIR TRAVEL WITH YOUR PET

Traveling can be highly stressful, both for you and the four-legged members of your family. But with thoughtful preparation, you can ensure a safe and comfortable trip for everyone.

The ASPCA urges pet owners to think twice about flying their pets on commercial airlines, especially if they plan on checking them in as cargo.

"Unless your animal is small enough to fit under your seat and you can bring him or her in the cabin, the ASPCA recommends pet owners to not fly their animal," says Lisa Weisberg, ASPCA Senior Vice President of Government Affairs and Public Policy. If pet owners have already committed to transporting their pets on commercial airlines, the following are tips for safe air travel with your pet:

1. Make airline reservations in advance. Whether your pet rides in the cargo hold or under the seat in front of you, it will need a ticket and spaces are limited. If possible, use airlines that hand carry your dog (inside the carrier) to and from the aircraft. Otherwise the carrier could simply be put on a conveyor belt.
2. Book a direct flight whenever possible and avoid connections and layovers. This will decrease the chances that your pet is left on the tarmac during extreme weather conditions or mishandled by baggage personnel.
3. Make sure your pet is wearing a collar and an identification tag. Breakaway collars are best for cats. The collar should also include destination information in case your pet escapes.
5. Purchase a USDA-approved shipping crate that is large enough for your pet to stand, sit and turn around in comfortably. Shipping crates can be purchased from many pet supply stores and airlines.
6. Write the words "Live Animal" in letters at least one inch tall on top of and at least one side of the crate. Use arrows to prominently indicate the upright position of the crate. On the top of the crate, write the name, address and telephone number of your pet's destination point, and whether you will be accompanying him or if someone else is picking him up. Make sure that the door is securely closed, but not locked, so that airline personnel can open it in case of an emergency. Line the crate bottom with some type of bedding—shredded paper or towels— to absorb accidents.
7. Affix a current photograph of your pet to the top of the crate for identification purposes. Should your pet escape from the carrier, this could be a lifesaver. You should also carry a photograph of your pet.
8. The night before you leave, make sure you've frozen a small dish or tray of water for your pet. This way, it can't spill during loading, and will melt by the time he's thirsty. Tape a small pouch, preferably cloth, of dried food outside the crate. Airline personnel will be able to feed your pet in case he gets hungry on long-distance flights or a layover.

9. Tranquilizing your pet is generally not recommended, as it could hamper his breathing. Check with your veterinarian first.

10. Do not feed your dog 6 hours prior to the flight and allow water up until the flight time. Water should be available inside the cage and give your pet fresh water as soon as you arrive to your destination.

11. Tell every airline employee you encounter, on the ground and in the air, that you are traveling with a pet in the cargo hold. This way, they'll be ready if any additional considerations or attention is needed.

12. If the plane is delayed, or if you have any concerns about the welfare of your pet, insist that airline personnel check the animal whenever feasible. In certain situations, removing the animal from the cargo hold and deplaning may be warranted.

13. Be aware that airline travel poses certain risks for animals with pre-existing medical problems and short faced breeds of dogs like bulldogs, Pekinese and Boston terriers. Always discuss this with your vet prior to traveling.

When selecting a crate or carrier for travel :

1. The cage should be large enough for your pet to stand up and turn around freely.
2. The walls of the carrier should be strong and waterproof.
3. There must be adequate ventilation on at least three sides of the cage.
4. The carrier should have sturdy handles for transport.
5. The cage should have a water tray which is accessible from the outside so that water can be added if needed.
6. Line the carrier with towels to absorb any "accidents."