

## Highlights of

# The Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters, Second Edition (2022)



## 11. Animal Transport and Relocation Programs

### 11.1 General

Animal relocation programs involve the transfer and transport of animals from one sheltering organization (the source) to another (the destination). Transport can be local, regional, or international. The purpose is typically to move companion animals from communities with an excess pet population to communities with unmet adopter demand. Intentionally designed relocation programs consider the health, behavior, and safety risks and benefits for all affected animals and minimize negative impacts through careful selection and planning.

### 11.2 Responsibilities for relocation programs

All participants in the relocation process must follow federal regulations for animal transportation as well as local or state regulations for both source and destination locations. Departments of Agriculture and Departments of Health commonly have requirements for animals being imported into their jurisdiction. These often include health certificates (i.e. Certificates of Veterinary Inspection [CVI]) and certain vaccinations; there may also be restrictions for age and health conditions. For commercial air transport, the airline must be consulted for specific requirements. Emergency plans must be made prior to transport, including emergency contact information, safe locations to stop if necessary, protocols to address vehicle problems, and a plan for animal and human medical emergencies. Written agreements between all parties involved in the relocation program should be developed and reviewed regularly. At minimum, such agreements address medical and behavioral selection criteria as well as transportation and destination requirements. A contact person must be identified at each transfer point, and a record of each animal's travel from source to destination must be kept. Public health and safety must be considered in the design of relocation programs and protocols. Zoonotic diseases with a regional distribution (e.g. plague, rabies, and *Leptospirosis*) and aggressive behaviors require special consideration (see Behavior, Public Health).

Organizations engaging in relocation should track standard metrics for transported animals. This includes animal demographics, behavioral and medical conditions, and outcomes. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, animals should not be returned to the source even in the event of unexpected medical or behavioral concerns. Transport is a significant stressor for the animal as well as a significant resource investment. If destination shelters regularly find that transported animals are not eligible for adoption, it is important for all parties to revisit selection criteria and program goals.

### 11.3 Responsibilities at the source

As with all shelters, all eligible animals within a source population must be vaccinated at or before intake (see Medical Health). It is not recommended to hold animals back from transport just to allow response to vaccination or to receive a booster. To prevent the spread of internal and external parasites, treatment for fleas, ticks, and internal parasites is strongly recommended. Ideally, all dogs 6 months of age and older are tested for heartworm disease prior to relocation.

The animal's health and behavior records must be shared with the destination. When required, a valid health certificate (CVI) and proof of rabies vaccination must accompany each animal. Requirements may vary from state to state. Animals must be examined by trained staff within 24 h prior to travel and deemed fit for transport. The purpose of the pre-transport examination is to look for evidence of infectious disease, and to evaluate the animal's ability to tolerate the impact of the physical and emotional experiences encountered during travel.

Animals being transported must be provided with visual identification. Collars or tags are routinely used, though in some cases, other techniques may be needed (e.g. marking the inner ear or painting a claw on a neonate). Ideally, animals are microchipped before transport, as this provides permanent identification. To aid in identification of individual animals, each primary transport enclosure must be marked with each animal's unique identifier.

A copy of the manifest for each transport, identifying each animal on board, must be maintained in an accessible location separate from the vehicle itself, in case an accident leads to loss or destruction of the manifest accompanying the animals. For example, a cloud-based digital manifest can be made available to source, transporter, and destination in real time.

### 11.4 Responsibilities during transport

**11.4.1 Primary enclosure and occupancy:** Ideally, animals should be acclimated to the transport carrier to reduce associated stress. Unfamiliar animals must not be transported together in the same primary enclosure. Transport enclosures must be large enough for animals to stand and sit erect, turn around normally while standing, and lie in a natural position without lying on another animal. They must not have sharp edges, and the flooring must prevent injury, discomfort, and leakage of fluids into other enclosures. Absorbent bedding must be provided unless it poses a risk to an individual animal's health. Kennels must be positioned in a manner that ensures adequate airflow and temperature regu-

lation within each primary enclosure; choose enclosures with vent openings on at least three sides and maintaining at least 1 inch (2 cm) of unobstructed space between vent openings and adjacent structures. When primary enclosures are permanently fixed to the vehicle so that only a single door provides ventilation, the door needs to face an unobstructed aisle. Primary enclosures must be secured to prevent movement within the vehicle, and doors secured to prevent accidental opening. In an emergency, operators must be able to swiftly remove animals.

**11.4.2 Special cases:** Cats should be provided with a hiding space or visual barrier that allows ventilation and monitoring during transport. Stress can be further reduced if cats are acclimated to their carrier prior to transport and provided familiar objects with their own scent. Ideally, all cats are provided with access to a litter box during long-distance transport. Cats and dogs are ideally transported in separate vehicles. If cats are transported in a vehicle with dogs, they must be housed in a physically separate space with special consideration given to visual and noise barriers.

Vulnerable populations, including puppies and kittens, geriatric animals, or animals with chronic medical or behavioral conditions, require special care during transport. This includes avoiding temperature extremes, more frequent feedings, and enhanced protection from infectious disease exposure. Pediatric and brachycephalic animals are more susceptible to temperature extremes and may require alternative modes of transport. Kittens or puppies less than 8 weeks old should be transported with their mother when possible in a single enclosure large enough for her to lie down with legs extended for comfort and to facilitate nursing. Importing animals under 8 weeks old may be prohibited in some states.

Behavior medications should be considered when an animal is likely to have emotional welfare concerns during transport. Safe and humane relocation programs do not use sedatives or behavior medications to compensate for poor transportation practices. It is unacceptable to transport animals that are sedated or anesthetized to the point that they are unable to swallow, walk, or thermoregulate.

**11.4.3 Vehicles:** Training in accident prevention and techniques to minimize animal discomfort are recommended (e.g. avoiding excessive lateral movement and sudden acceleration or deceleration). Control over heating and cooling in the animal compartment is essential and must be monitored; alarms can facilitate monitoring when drivers and animals are in separate compartments. For animal safety, ambient temperature must be maintained above 45°F (7.2°C) and below 85°F (29.5°C), and humidity maintained between 30 and 70%. To ensure comfortable conditions, ambient temperature should be maintained between 64°F (18°C) and 80°F (26.6°C). Operators must ensure that air in the animal compartment is fresh and free of vehicle exhaust fumes; carbon monoxide detectors should be placed in the animal compartment.

**11.4.4 Monitoring and care:** Vehicle drivers or animal attendants must have sufficient training to recognize and respond to animal needs during transport. For transports longer than 4 hours, two drivers should be present to monitor and reload animals. At minimum, every 4 hours, the vehicle must be stopped, and a visual observation of each animal must be performed. If it becomes necessary to remove animals from their enclosures, safeguards are needed to ensure animal safety and to prevent escape. Caregivers also are charged with meeting the nutritional needs of transported animals. For juvenile animals, a small meal should be given no more than 4 hours before departure, and small amounts of food should be provided every 4 hours throughout transport. For both adults and juveniles, water must be provided at least every 4 hours during observation stops. Food must be provided at least every 24 hours for adults.

During transport, driving time to an intermediate or final destination should not exceed 12 hours per day, and loading and unloading of animals should not exceed 1 hour each. Transport that exceeds 12 hours of travel must be broken up with an overnight rest stop. Total transport time from the source to a final destination should include no more than 28 hours confined to a transport vehicle, including loading and unloading time and excluding an overnight rest stop. Animals should never be left unattended in a transport vehicle unless sufficient monitoring capabilities are in place, and attendants are able to immediately respond to animal care needs. When feasible, an overnight facility that can accommodate the housing of cats and dogs off of the vehicle is preferred. Overnight facilities can include foster homes, shelters, hotels, or transport hubs. Cats may benefit from remaining in their transport carriers, if large enough. Cats must have access to a litter box if housed overnight.

**11.4.5 Aggregation:** If transporting animals from different sources on separate vehicles is not possible, animals from each source are ideally housed in separate compartments. Protocols that minimize exposure and cross-contamination between populations must be in place.

## 11.5 Responsibilities at the destination

Each animal admitted through a relocation program must receive a brief health assessment at intake to identify signs of infectious disease and problems that require emergency or follow-up medical care. The destination facility must have adequate housing prepared for the arriving animals without displacing the existing population. The need for isolation or quarantine of arriving animals is informed by regulatory requirements, animal health status, and infectious disease risk. Quarantines are only appropriate for high-risk animals with direct infectious disease exposure; unnecessary holds increase LOS and are detrimental to animal health and organizational goals.

*See the full guidelines for references and supporting documents:  
<https://jsmcah.org/index.php/jasv/issue/view/2>*