

Highlights of

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



4. Facilities

4.1 General

While community-centered sheltering practices and foster programs are reducing the demand for in-shelter care in some areas, providing housing for animals remains an essential part of sheltering operations. The quality and set-up of animal housing impacts every aspect of their experience at the facility and plays a pivotal role in managing disease.

4.2 Primary enclosures

A primary enclosure is an area of confinement such as a cage, kennel, or housing unit where an animal spends the majority of their time. The primary enclosure must be structurally sound and maintained in safe, working condition to prevent injury and escape. Primary enclosures with wire-mesh bottoms or slatted floors are unacceptable because they can cause pain, discomfort, and injury. Enclosure sides that are entirely wire or chain-link increase the risk of disease transmission, animal stress, and injury. Solid barriers are recommended where animal contact can occur. Cages or crates intended for temporary confinement or travel are unacceptable for use as primary enclosures.

4.2.1 Individual primary enclosure size: Animals must be able to make normal postural adjustments within their primary enclosure, including standing and walking several steps, sitting normally, laying down at full body length, and holding the tail completely erect. Individual adult cat housing that is less than 8 ft² (0.75 m²) of floor space is unacceptable. Ideally, individual cat housing provides 11 ft² (1.0 m²) or more of floor space. For dogs, the minimum recommended kennel dimensions differ widely based on body size. The primary enclosure must allow animals to sit, sleep, and eat away from areas of their enclosures where they defecate and urinate. Housing with two or more appropriately sized compartments provides this separation and facilitates spot cleaning, reduces fomite transmission, and increases personnel safety (see Sanitation). Multi-compartment housing is particularly important for newly admitted, fractious, quarantined, sick, and juvenile animals. Cat housing units should be elevated off the floor and should face away from each other or be spaced more than 4 ft (1.2 m) apart. Primary enclosures with indoor-outdoor access are ideal for most animals, especially when held long term.

4.2.2 Primary enclosure set-up: The set-up of the enclosure and care items provided are important in meeting the welfare needs of shelter animals (Figures 4.1 & 4.2). The enclosure needs to be large enough to accommodate the necessary set-up without impeding the animal's ability to move or stretch. All dogs should be given the opportunity to hide within their enclosure, especially

young, small, fearful, and anxious animals. A soft resting place that elevates animals off of the floor should be made available for all animals to ensure comfort, keep animals dry, and support thermo-regulation. All cats must be given the opportunity to hide within their enclosure. To ensure that cats can display natural behaviors, feline primary enclosures must allow scratching, climbing, and perching. Cats must have a litter box large enough to comfortably accommodate their entire body and allow for proper posturing.

4.2.3 Additional considerations: Appropriately sized, enriched primary enclosures are critical for all animals regardless of their length of stay (LOS) in the shelter. Housing that provides animals with additional space, enrichment, and choice within their enclosure must be provided for animals remaining in the shelter long term (i.e. more than 2 weeks). Foster care, while beneficial for many animals, can be particularly valuable when animals require a longer LOS, such as protracted legal holds or long-term medical care. Animals for whom handling poses an acute welfare or safety risk need to be housed in enclosures that allow humane, touch-free daily care (i.e. multi-compartment). It is unacceptable to house animals in an enclosure that would require the use of forceful animal handling equipment for daily cleaning and care (see Animal Handling). Except for a brief, emergency situation, it is unacceptable to house animals in facility spaces not intended for animal housing (e.g. bathrooms and hallways). Tethering is an unacceptable method of confinement for any animal.

4.3 Cohousing

Cohousing or group housing (keeping more than one animal in an enclosure) can improve animal welfare by facilitating social contact with other animals of the same species but is not suitable for every situation. Mental and physical benefits need to be carefully weighed against health and safety risks.

4.3.1 Cohousing enclosure set-up: The optimal space requirements for cohousing vary based on species, as well as size, activity level, and behavior. A minimum of 18 ft² (1.7 m²) of floor space per adult cat should be provided for cohousing.

Appropriate resources (e.g. food, water, bedding, litter boxes, elevated perches, hiding places, and toys) must be provided to minimize competition or resource guarding.

4.3.2 Selecting animals for cohousing: Cohousing requires careful selection of animals by trained personnel; unrelated or unfamiliar animals must not be cohoused until health and behavior are assessed. Monitoring after introduction is essential

to recognize signs of stress or negative interactions (e.g. guarding food or other resources). Animals predicted to have longer LOS may benefit most from cohousing. No more than six adult cats should be cohoused; pairs are preferred for dogs but no more than two to four adult dogs should be cohoused in a primary enclosure. Housing young puppies and kittens with their mother and littermates is important for physical and emotional development. Because of their susceptibility to infectious disease, puppies and kittens under 20 weeks of age must not be cohoused with unfamiliar animals except when the benefits outweigh the risks for all animals involved.

4.3.3 Monitoring cohoused animals: Monitoring, especially after a new animal is introduced into a group and during feeding time, is critical to ensure that all animals are benefitting. In addition to daily monitoring for resource guarding and other signs of social conflict, regular physical examinations including measurement of body weight can ensure that cohoused animals are not suffering due to unrecognized social conflicts. Not all animals are well suited to cohousing.

4.4 Isolation housing

Isolation housing must meet the medical and behavioral needs of ill animals. Separate isolation areas must be provided for animals with different highly contagious diseases to prevent coinfections with multiple pathogens. Isolation rooms must be designed so that they do not open directly into another animal housing area. Isolation rooms must be clearly labeled to indicate current use and necessary precautions and should have access to a sink for handwashing and be set up with space for treatments, examinations, and storage for dedicated supplies. Ideally, isolation rooms are designed with windows to allow observation of animals from a corridor without needing to repeatedly enter the room.

4.5 Surfaces and drainage

Primary enclosures and all animal areas must be able to be fully sanitized and withstand repeated cleanings. Nonporous surfaces are important in cages and kennels, as well as high traffic areas such as walkways or playrooms. A sealed, impermeable surface, such as resinous epoxy or resinous urethane, is recommended for shelter flooring. Linoleum or tiles may be acceptable flooring in low-risk areas but are less durable and more challenging to sanitize. Drainage systems must be designed to prevent standing water and cross-contamination of waste between housing units. Outdoor portions of primary enclosures must have nonporous, durable floors that allow for sanitation and proper drainage.

4.6 Heating, ventilation, and air quality

To ensure humane and comfortable conditions, environmental temperature must be maintained between 64°F (18°C) and 80°F (26.6°C). The relative humidity should be maintained between 30% and 70%. Ventilation must not compromise recommended ambient temperatures. The standard recommendation for ventilation of animal facilities is between 10 and 20 room air exchanges

per hour with fresh air but can vary with population density. To improve ventilation, barred enclosure doors are recommended over plexiglass doors or fully enclosed units. Air from isolation areas should be exhausted outside and not recirculated.

4.7 Noise control

Noise levels that are uncomfortable for humans are likely to be very uncomfortable for animals (see Behavior). Noise and vibration-producing equipment and mechanical systems should be located as far away from animal housing as possible. Prevention and mitigation strategies to minimize the impact of noise can include arrangement of cages; material selection for cages, doors, and latches; and decisions about where to house individual animals. Facility design, environmental management, enrichment strategies, and behavior modification can dramatically reduce noise levels related to barking.

4.8 Lighting

Facilities should be designed to offer as much natural light as possible. Exposure to sunlight in a manner that maintains daily circadian rhythms improves health and well-being for animals and for shelter personnel. When artificial light is used, it should approximate natural light in duration and intensity to support circadian rhythms. If it is necessary to keep lights on after dark for safety or by regulation, a fixture that emits red-orange light is preferred.

4.9 Enrichment spaces

Dedicated indoor or outdoor enrichment, exercise, and training spaces need to provide protection from the elements and limit exposure to disease and parasites. All enclosed outdoor spaces should have double door entry points to reduce the risk of escape.

4.10 Intake spaces

Shelter admission areas should be separated from adoptions and other client-facing areas. If a different space is not available, placing a divider within the lobby or scheduling intake appointments outside of adoption hours can functionally separate admissions from adoptions.

4.11 Drop boxes

The use of 'drop boxes' where live animals are placed in unmonitored receptacles for later intake is unsafe and unacceptable.

4.12 Facility design and planning

When designing a new facility or undertaking a significant renovation, shelters should consult with a shelter veterinarian and an architect experienced in shelter design. The movement of animals, people, and supplies should be incorporated into the design. Shelters must avoid large warehouse type rooms; multiple smaller rooms with fewer primary enclosures per area are strongly preferred.

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