

Six questions to ask when selecting a boarding kennel for your pet...

- **What vaccinations do you require?** This question does not just help you confirm that your pet has had the shots it needs to stay at the kennel...it also can help you judge whether the kennel puts a priority on the health and well-being of its guests. Almost every kennel will require rabies vaccinations—those are required by law throughout the US. But a safety-conscious kennel also will require vaccinations for distemper...parvo...and kennel cough, all of which easily can spread from dog to dog at a kennel if its guests are not vaccinated. (Some or all of these vaccinations are required by law in certain states as well.)
- **Can I see where my pet will stay?** The kennel should be happy to give you a look at its facilities. A well-run kennel will look—and smell—clean. Also, confirm that the cages are large enough that your pet will be able to stand, turn and move around. If you have a small pet, confirm that the cages do not have any gaps large enough that the animal might try to squeeze through.
- **What would you do if a pet had a serious medical issue on a Sunday?** This question is a good way to gauge whether a kennel has adequate emergency plans in place. Most veterinary practices are closed on Sundays, so an employee should identify the closest animal hospital that is open on Sundays...and/or say that the kennel has a local vet who is on call.
- **Do the dogs get to socialize with one another?** Both “yes” and “no” are defensible answers here—most dogs love to get out of their cages and play together...but when groups of dogs that do not know one another play together, there occasionally are fights and injuries. If the answer is “yes,” ask what steps are taken to ensure that dogs play well with others before they are allowed to join the group—there should be some sort of screening procedure in place. Also ask how many kennel employees monitor the play area and how many dogs are allowed in it at a time—anything above 10 dogs per employee is too many. If possible, visit the kennel during a group playtime to make sure that it seems well supervised. If you do *not* want your dog to play with other dogs you do not know, consider seeking a kennel that has private runs attached to the cages, especially for kennel stays of more than a few days.
- **Where do cats stay?** Dogs are noisy. So a kennel’s cat cages should be far enough from the dog cages that the cat room seems calm and relatively quiet when the door is closed. Some barking noise is inevitable—this is a kennel, after all—but if the barking is loud in the cat area (or, worse, the dogs are within view of the cats), you are going to have unhappy, agitated cats. Even dog owners should ask to see the cat area—a kennel that boards cats too close to dogs might be a kennel that has not properly thought through other aspects of its care and facilities either.
- **What do you do if an animal has trouble adjusting to the kennel?** This is rare—the vast majority of pets do just fine in kennels—but there still should be a procedure in place. *Example:* You might be told that the staff will spend time giving the animal one-on-one attention...and if the situation does not improve, the pet’s owner will be contacted so that he/she can weigh in on what to do.
- **Are you licensed?** Kennels are typically licensed by the state and the license should be clearly posted.

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