Pets on Planes Lesson 2: A Lesson for Airline Personnel and Those Handling Pets in Transport

Last Modified:

Most often, pets that travel by air arrive safely at their destination and are happily reunited with their owners. Unfortunately, the trip does not always go smoothly for some pets as they become injured or even die during air travel.

This lesson is designed for airport personnel who are responsible for caring for dogs and cats and handling kennels during air travel. After reviewing this lesson, you will identify many factors that can improve the safety of pets during air travel and increase the likelihood that the pets will arrive healthy at their destination.

These factors include the appropriate care and handling of dogs, cats, and kennels under both normal and extreme conditions.

Lesson 2: For Airline Personnel and Those Handling Pets in Transport

Transporting and Handling Dogs and Cats During Air Travel

Dogs and cats must be treated with care and their kennels must be handled carefully throughout their air travel experience.

Feeding and Watering

One of the first considerations is the regular feeding and watering of dogs and cats during air travel.

Dogs and cats 16 weeks of age or more must be offered food at least once every 24 hours. Puppies and kittens less than 16 weeks of age must be offered food at least once every 12 hours. All dogs and cats must be offered potable water at least once every 12 hours.

Regular Care when Handling Dogs or Cats

Dogs and cats must be cared for regularly during air travel.

- Dogs and cats must be observed as regularly as possible during air transport (at least once every 4 hours if cargo area is accessible). This includes when the dog or cat is loaded and unloaded and whenever the animal cargo space is accessible.
- Dogs and cats must not be removed from their kennel except when the kennel is being cleaned, during veterinary care, in case of an emergency, or when the dog or cat is transferred to another kennel or facility that meets Animal Welfare Act standards.
- If the dogs or cats are in transit for more than 24 hours, the kennels must be cleaned. If it becomes necessary to remove the dog or cat from the kennel to clean the kennel, the procedure must be completed in a way that safeguards the dog or cat from injury and prevents escape.
- If a dog or cat is obviously ill, injured, or in physical distress, it must not be transported in commerce, except to receive veterinary care.

Avoiding Contact with Other Pets

Efforts should be made to prevent dogs and cats from coming into direct contact with other pets during air travel.

No more than one dog or cat, 6 months of age or older, may be transported in the same kennel. No more than two live puppies or kittens 8 weeks to 6 months of age, that are of comparable size, and weighing 20 pounds (9 Kg) or less, may be transported in the same kennel.

Handling Dog and Cat Kennels

Special care is required when handling kennels containing dogs and cats.

- Kennels must be handled in a manner that protects the animals from physical harm or distress.
- Kennels must be moved between the holding areas and the planes as quickly as possible.
- Kennels must not be tossed, dropped, or needlessly tilted, or stacked in a manner that may cause the kennel to fall.
- Kennels must be protected from the elements.

Care with Kennels on Conveyor Belts

Conveyor belts used in loading or unloading planes and other airport locations pose potential risks to dogs and cats in kennels.

An attendant must be present at each end of the inclined conveyor belt when a kennel is being loaded or unloaded from planes. A kennel must not be placed on any other conveyor belt such as a baggage claim conveyor belt.

Shelter from Extreme Temperatures

Dogs, cats, and their kennels should be protected from exposure to extreme temperature.

Dogs and cats must not be exposed to air temperatures above 85 °F (29.5 °C) or below 45 °F (7.2 °C) for a period of more than 4 hours. Dogs must not be accepted for transport unless the animal holding areas meet these temperature requirements.

Shelter from Extreme Weather

Dogs and cats and their kennels should also be protected from exposure to extreme weather conditions.

Kennels should be protected from extreme sunlight and extreme heat and cold. Sufficient shade must be provided to always protect the dog from the direct rays of the sun. When moving dogs or cats to or from the airplane or animal holding areas, the dog or cat must not be exposed to ambient temperatures above 85 °F or below 45 °F for more than 45 minutes.

Holding Area Conditions

Conditions in the areas used to hold dogs or cats can also influence the animal's health and well-being.

Ventilation must be provided in any animal holding area by means of windows, doors, vents, or air conditioning. Auxiliary ventilation, such as exhaust fans, vents, fans, blowers, or air conditioners, must be used in any animal holding area when the temperature is 85 °F or higher. Sufficient protection must be provided to keep the dog or cat dry during rain or snow

Cargo Area Conditions

The cargo area conditions can also affect the dog's or cat's health.

The animal cargo space must be constructed and maintained in a manner that protects the safety, health, and well-being always of the animals. The animal cargo space must:

- have an adequate supply of air for normal breathing.
- be heated and cooled as necessary to maintain temperature and humidity that ensures the animal's health and well-being.
- be pressurized when the airplane is not on the ground, unless flying under 8,000 feet.
- not contain exhaust fumes or other hazardous substances (e.g., dry ice) in a manner that may harm dogs or cats.

Labeling and Routing Kennels

Persons handling and caring for dogs and cats during air transportation should observe the kennel labeling carefully.

Observing Kennel Labels

Kennels include arrows and "Live Animal" labels to assist the kennel handlers.

All kennels require special handling. Any person handling a kennel should observe the "This Side Up" arrows to make sure that they orient the kennel properly.

Following Routing Instruction

Kennel handlers should make sure that the kennel and dog or cat arrive at the proper location.

Any person handling a kennel with “Live Animal” labels should take extra care to assure that the kennel is routed to the correct destination.

Emergency Situations

Occasionally persons handling dogs face emergency situations that require special care and attention.

Dog or Cat Becomes Ill or Unconscious

What should be done if the dog or cat becomes ill or unconscious during air travel?

Dogs or cats that arrive at the airport ill, injured, non-responsive, or unconscious must not travel except to receive veterinary care. A licensed veterinarian should treat pets that become ill, injured, or non-responsive during travel. The carrier must determine whether any of the dogs or cats are in physical distress and arrange for any needed veterinary care as soon as possible.

Dog or Cat Becomes Uneasy or Aggressive

Dogs or cats arriving at the airport that are highly nervous or aggressive should not travel.

Dog or Cat Sustains an Injury During Transport

What should be done if a dog or cat is injured during air travel?

A licensed veterinarian should treat pets that become injured during travel. The carrier must determine whether any of the dogs or cats are in physical distress and arrange for any needed veterinary care as soon as possible.

Extreme Weather or Crisis Situations

What can be done to care for dogs and cats in an extreme weather or other crisis?

In extreme weather or crisis situations such as a tornado, earthquake, or airport evacuation, pet kennels should be moved to a safe location that reduces likelihood of trauma, overheating, excessive cooling, behavioral stress, physical harm, or unnecessary discomfort.

Dog or Cat Escapes

What if a dog or cat somehow escapes and is running loose?

If a dog or cat escapes, the attendant should immediately attempt to retrieve the animal using caution. If the attendant is unable to retrieve the dog or cat immediately, the attendant should report the animal's escape to airport security.

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Lesson 1-2 iBook (zip)

(ZIP, 362.87 MB)

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Lesson 1 PDF

Lesson 2 PDF

Test Your Knowledge

Watch a short video and then answer a question about each of the following topics.

Expand All

Feeding and Watering

feeding and watering

Question: Dogs and cats 16 weeks of age or more must be offered food _____.

A. Once every 24 hours
B. In the morning and afternoon
C. After the dog's first walk

Answer: A**.** Dogs and cats over 16 weeks of age must be offered food once every 24 hours.

Regular Care When Handling Dogs and Cats

regular care when handling dogs

Question: During the course of air travel, dogs and cats should be _____.

A. Removed from their kennel every 4 hours for exercise
B. Observed in their kennel at least every 4 hours
C. Allowed to urinate outside of their kennel every 4 hours

Answer: B. Dogs and cats should be observed regularly (at least once in every 4 hours) during air transport.

Avoiding Contact with Other Pets

avoiding contact with other pets

Question: Normally a maximum of ____ dog(s) or cat(s) can be transported in a kennel.

A. One
B. Two
C. Four

Answer: A. Normally only one dog or cat may be transported in the same kennel.

Handling Dog and Cat Kennels

handling dog kennels

Question: When handling kennels with live animals the kennels must _____.

A. Not be placed on elevated shelves
B. Be protected from the elements
C. Not be placed in elevators

Answer: B. Kennels with live animals must be protected from extreme weather or other elements.

Care with Kennels on Conveyor Belts

care with kennels on conveyor belt

Question: When kennels with live animals are placed on conveyor belts,_____.

A. Attendant(s) must observe the conveyor belt
B. The kennel must be securely strapped to the conveyor belt
C. Kennels should never be placed on conveyor belts

Answer: A. Kennels must not be placed on unattended conveyor belts.

Shelter from Extreme Weather

shelter from extreme weather

Question: In holding areas, dogs and cats must NOT be in temperatures above ___ or below ___for more than 45 minutes.

A. Above 75 °F or below 55 °F
B. Above 85 °F or below 45 °F
C. Above 95 °F or below 25 °F

Answer: B. Forty-five minutes is the maximum time that dogs or cats may be exposed to temperatures above 85 °F (29.5 °C) or below 45 °F (7.2 °C).

Shelter from Extreme Temperatures

pet extreme temperature

Question: Dogs and cats must not be in temperatures above 85°F or below 45 °F for more than __ hour(s).

A. 1
B. 4
C. 8

Answer: B. Four hours is the maximum time that dogs or cats may be exposed to temperatures above 85 °F (29.5 °C) or below 45 °F (7.2 °C).

Holding Area Conditions

holding area conditions

Question: The holding area where dogs and cats are placed between flights should _____.

A. Have adequate ventilation
B. Be listed on the dog's flight itinerary
C. Be free of people or other animal kennels

Answer: A. Holding areas must have adequate ventilation and temperature control.

Cargo Area Conditions

cargo area conditions

Question: The animal cargo space must _____.

A. Contain viewing windows for dogs and cats
B. Be pressurized when the airplane is in flight
C. Have a veterinarian on site

Answer: B. The animal cargo space must be pressurized when the airplane is in flight.

Observing Kennel Labels

observing kennel labels

Question: The kennel label arrows indicate _____.

A. The final destination of the kennel
B. The direction for the kennel's ventilation
C. How the kennel should be oriented

Answer: C, The arrows on the side of kennels indicate which side of the kennel should remain up.

Following Routing Instructions

airline routing information

Question: The kennel routing information indicates _____.

A. The final destination of the kennel
B. The breed and age of the dog or cat
C. The dog or cat owner's departure time

Answer: A. The final destination of the dog or cat is a critical aspect of the routing information.

Dog or Cat Becomes Ill or Unconscious

dog becomes ill or unconscious

Question: When a dog or cat becomes ill, injured, or non-responsive during air travel _____.

A. The dog or cat should be re-routed to their departure airport
B. The attendant should administer a mild tranquilizer
C. The dog or cat should be treated by a licensed veterinarian

Answer: C. Dogs or cats that become ill, injured, or non-responsive during air travel should be treated by a licensed veterinarian.

Dog or Cat Becomes Uneasy or Aggressive

dogs become uneasy or aggressive

Question: Dogs or cats that are highly nervous or aggressive at the airport _____.

A. Should be given a mild tranquilizer
B. Should not travel
C. Should be disciplined appropriately by the attendant

Answer: B. Dogs or cats that are highly nervous or aggressive at the airport should not travel.

Dog or Cat Sustains an Injury

pet injury

Question: A dog or cat that sustains an injury during transport _____.

A. Should be treated by a licensed veterinarian
B. Should be treated immediately by the airline attendant
C. Should be given a mild tranquilizer

Answer: A. If a dog or cat sustains an injury during transport, they should be treated by a licensed veterinarian.

Extreme Weather or Crisis Situations

extreme weather or crisis situation

Question: In extreme weather or crisis situations, kennels with live animals should be _____.

A. Returned to the originating airport
B. Moved to a safe location
C. Re-routed to an airport away from the crisis

Answer: B. In extreme weather or crisis situations, the kennels should be moved to a safe location.

Dog or Cat Escapes the Kennel

pet escapes kennel

Question: If a dog or cat escapes a kennel, the attendant should _____.

A. Notify the owner that the dog/cat is lost
B. First notify a supervisor
C. Immediately attempt to retrieve the dog or cat using caution

Answer: C. If a dog or cat escapes a kennel, the attendant should immediately attempt to retrieve the animal using caution.

More Information

- Pet Travel Resources on Government, Association, and Airline Websites

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