

# Protecting the welfare of pet dogs and cats during journeys

## Advice for owners



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE



**defra**  
Department for Environment  
Food and Rural Affairs

# Protecting the welfare of pet dogs and cats during journeys: Advice for owners

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## Protecting the welfare of pet dogs and cats during journeys: Advice for owners

This guide is to help you care for and protect your pets during journeys to and from Great Britain.

Whenever animals are transported, including journeys with pets, the law says that:

**'No person shall transport any animal in a way which causes or is likely to cause injury or unnecessary suffering to that animal.'**  
**(See note 1 below.)**

If you pay a 'carrier' (for example, a ferry, plane or train) to transport your pet, by law you must meet certain conditions for your pet to travel.

On shorter ferry journeys and the Channel Tunnel Shuttle, your pet will normally have to stay in your vehicle. On longer ferry journeys and on planes, your pet should travel in a special container. Currently the ferry between Rosyth and Belgium allows pets to travel in certain cabins. Check with the ferry company for their latest policy.

Carriers may refuse to transport your pet if they are not able to provide suitable conditions for it throughout the journey, or if the animal appears not to be fit to travel.

Note 1: Taken from Article 4(1) of The Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997. This order puts into practice Council Directive 91/628 EEC (as amended) on protecting animals during transport. You can get guidance on the order from our website at [www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare](http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare) or by contacting us (see page 19).

## Plan the journey

You should plan for travelling with your pet well before the journey. Think carefully about the type of journey it is and the effect that it will have on your pet, taking into account how big the animal is, its nature, and how long the journey is.

If you cannot be sure that you can protect your animal's welfare on the journey, you should consider making other travel plans or not transporting your animal.

You should make sure that you know and understand the carrier's conditions for transporting your pet, and that you have booked a place for it to travel if necessary. Animals transported under the Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) must travel on an authorised route with an approved carrier.

Tell the carrier beforehand if the animal is a guide dog or an assistance dog, so that they can make special arrangements if necessary.

## Make sure your pet is fit to travel

Your pet should be healthy and fit for the intended journey. If necessary, ask your vet for advice before beginning the journey. An animal is **not** normally fit for transport if it:

- is ill or injured (except for minor illness or injury);
- is newborn with an unhealed navel;
- cannot feed itself and is not travelling with its mother;
- has given birth within the 48 hours before starting the journey; or
- is heavily pregnant and likely to give birth during the journey.

Animals under about 10 months old cannot enter Great Britain under PETS.

## Before the journey

Your pet will travel better if it does not have a full stomach, so only provide a light meal about two hours before the journey starts. Make sure water is available at all times.

We do not recommend giving a sedative to your pet, particularly if your pet is travelling by plane. This is because it is difficult to predict the effect that the sedative will have on the animal. You should follow your vet's advice about sedatives. If you do give your pet a sedative, you should carry a certificate which states the drug, dosage, and the date and time it was given.

If possible, make sure your pet has been to the toilet just before leaving or before it is put in its travel enclosure or container.

Introduce your pet to its travel enclosure or container before travelling, as this should help reduce the stress of transport. A familiar object (for example, a toy or a cloth) may help the animal to settle into strange surroundings.

## During the journey

Make sure that your pet is safely enclosed in the vehicle, travel enclosure or container. Keep the door locked.

The vehicle, travel enclosure or container should have enough ventilation at all times. Heat and moisture can quickly build up inside unless there is enough air flowing through.

Shortly after the start of the journey, check that your pet has settled down, and check that all is well whenever you have the opportunity during the journey.

Your pet should have clean fresh water at all times. Your pet must not be without water for more than 12 hours, or without food for more than 24 hours, in any circumstances.

Never leave an animal in a vehicle in direct strong sunshine or high temperatures. Overheating, distress and suffering is likely when the temperature goes above 25°C for more than a few minutes (unless the animals are already used to hot weather). The temperature inside a car in full sun on a hot day can quickly rise to double the temperature outside, leading rapidly to distress for any animal in the vehicle.

## Heatstroke in dogs

Dogs differ from people in how they cope with heat. They lose heat mainly by panting and, unlike people, do not sweat a lot. Dogs with snub noses (for example, Pekinese) or dogs with breathing problems are much more likely to suffer from heat stress. Long-haired dogs are more likely to be affected than those with short hair.

## How you can recognise overheating

The first signs are often faster, heavier panting and more activity, with barking or whining. Dogs will look obviously agitated.

The dog may produce more saliva than normal, often with drooling and with strands of saliva hanging from the mouth.

Extreme panting and dark-coloured gums will follow. The dog's eyes may become glassy and it may appear to be unconscious.

Once the dog's body temperature is raised so much that cells begin to die, seizures, coma and death will follow.

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Detecting overheating early and treating it promptly is essential to your dog recovering successfully. Take the dog to a cool shaded place, give it water to drink and spray it with cool water (you can also cool down the dog by blowing cool air from a fan over it). Get advice from a vet immediately if the dog does not respond promptly.

### Travelling by vehicle

The United Kingdom (UK) 'Highway Code' states: 'When in a vehicle make sure dogs or other animals are suitably restrained so they cannot distract you while you are driving or injure you if you stop quickly'. In some European countries, the law does not allow dogs to travel loose in vehicles.

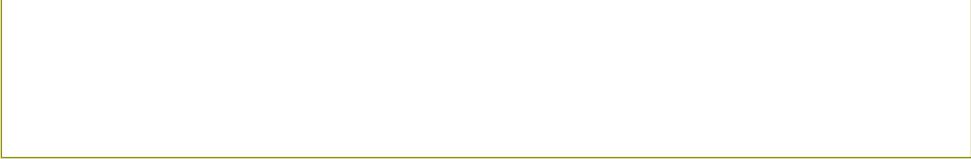
Your pet should preferably travel in a container which meets particular standards (see page 18). A cat or very small dog should **always** travel in a container, and the container should be placed where it:

- cannot move when you accelerate, brake and go round corners;
- is easy to get to; and
- is not exposed to strong sunlight or cold draughts.

If your dog travels loose in the vehicle, it should not be able to escape through any window. When windows need to be left open, we suggest you use 'window guards' to prevent the animal escaping.

If the dog is travelling in the luggage compartment of an estate car or hatchback, you should fit a secure dog-guard, and the floor should have a non-slip surface.

Providing enough ventilation at all times is essential – both when the vehicle is moving, and even more so when it is not moving – particularly in hot or sunny conditions.

- 
- Never leave your pet in a vehicle in direct strong sunshine or high temperatures as it is difficult to make sure there is enough ventilation to keep it cool.
  - There will be much less air flowing through the vehicle when it is in an enclosed space during ferry crossings (or on a train travelling through the Channel Tunnel) unless you leave the windows open enough.

You should carry water, and food if necessary, and have a way of giving these to your animal.

## **Travelling by ferry**

If you are a foot passenger travelling with your pet, you may need to take your pet onto the ferry in a container and keep it in the container during the voyage.

If you are travelling on a ferry in a vehicle:

- try and get to the port early so that the carrier can give you the most suitable position in the car deck for your pet;
- travel overnight if possible, when the temperature may be cooler;
- make sure that the ferry company officials responsible for loading know that there is a live animal in your vehicle, and follow their instructions;
- before you leave your vehicle, make sure that your pet will have enough ventilation (normally you will need to leave at least one of the vehicle's windows partly open, but it is also important to make sure your pet cannot escape);
- make sure your pet is comfortable and has enough water; and

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- never leave your pet in a vehicle in direct strong sunshine or high temperatures as it is difficult to make sure there is enough ventilation to keep it cool. The inside of a vehicle left in strong sunlight on an open deck, or in an enclosed deck where the temperature is likely to be higher than 25°C for more than a few minutes, will very quickly become too hot for the animal inside and cause distress and suffering.

For safety reasons, you are not normally able to visit the vehicle decks while the ferry is at sea. However, you can arrange this if it is essential. The ferry company should tell you about its access policy.

You shouldn't need to check on your pet on shorter ferry crossings (less than two hours). However, if this is essential (for example, in severe weather conditions), you can ask permission from staff at the information desk.

On longer ferry crossings (two hours or more) you should arrange (usually at the information desk) to visit your pet at suitable times to check on it and, if appropriate, to give it more water and food and an opportunity to exercise and go to the toilet.

On very long ferry crossings (24 hours or more), or long voyages on other vessels, it is likely that the company will need to transfer your pet from your vehicle into a container in a special area of the vessel. The company should give you information about its policy (including who provides the container), and the procedure for visiting and looking after the animal during the voyage.

## Travelling by train through the Channel Tunnel

Your pet will stay with you on the train, and you should keep it in your vehicle.

You should keep a cat or very small dog in a container inside your vehicle.

## Travelling by plane

Because of the special circumstances of travelling by plane, including how altitude affects animals, there are stricter rules and precautions than for other types of transport.

When you book your flight, make sure that the airline knows you will have a pet with you and ask for their advice about:

- the size and design of container to use; and
- which kinds of pets can travel.

By law, you must meet the International Air Transport Association (IATA) Live Animals Regulations to transport animals by plane. These contain specific details for containers for dogs and cats, including:

- design;
- ventilation;
- size; and
- arrangements for providing water and food.

The airline should check that the container you use is suitable for your pet and that it meets the IATA conditions before accepting it. In most cases your pet will travel in the aircraft hold and you cannot normally visit your pet during the flight.

The IATA Live Animals Regulations do not allow the following animals to travel by plane.

- Puppies and kittens under eight weeks old.
- Female animals with suckling young.
- Some airlines have extra restrictions on young animals and snub-nosed dogs.

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You can visit the IATA website for more information at: [www.iata.org/whatwedo/live\\_animals/pets.htm](http://www.iata.org/whatwedo/live_animals/pets.htm)

Every pet animal travelling to Great Britain by plane must meet the conditions shown in its animal health documentation or import licence (or both).

### Documents

Animals going into quarantine must have an import licence to enter Great Britain. You can get more information by calling the Defra Quarantine Section or the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (see page 19 for contact details).

If you bring an animal into Great Britain from outside the European Community, it must also meet Customs conditions. You should get advice from the agent, travel company or airline involved in transporting your pet.

Make sure that any documents you need are current and valid. To avoid delays at check-in counters and control posts, you should make sure that you have all the documents you need with you (including PETS documents if appropriate).

### Guidance on pet containers

The guidance in the list below will help you choose a container that is suitable for your pet and the type of transport. The advice about how containers should be constructed and their measurements is mainly for plane journeys, but the general principles also apply to other transport.

- Your pet container should be a suitable size for your pet – it should be at least big enough for your pet to stand, sit and lie down in a natural position, and turn around easily. A container used to take

an animal on a short journey to the vet may not be suitable or large enough for a longer journey.

- The container should not contain anything which could injure the animal. It should be designed so that no part of the animal (such as the head, paws or tail) can stick out or get trapped.
- The container should provide enough ventilation and fresh air for your pet throughout the journey to make sure they do not get too hot. Remember that a container put in a travel enclosure (for example, the hold of an aircraft) may be in 'still air' conditions for long periods of time.
- Your pet should have access to water at all times in the container, and to food if the journey is longer than a few hours. You should place food and water bowls (preferably spill-proof) in the container, or fix them to it so that the animal cannot knock them over or spill the contents. On longer journeys bowls should be able to be refilled easily.
- There should be enough absorbent bedding in the container – newspaper alone is not enough for long journeys, but you can use several layers of it with other absorbent material, such as matting. During a very long journey, this may need to be changed. Containers for cats should have litter trays which are either heavy enough not to move around or fixed to stop them moving.

## Container construction

You can buy rigid plastic pet containers from good pet shops and suppliers. Or, the container can be made of other materials, particularly for large or aggressive dogs. A container which is suitable for a short domestic journey may not necessarily be strong enough, large enough, or suitably designed for long journeys, particularly by air. The airline will decide whether or not to accept rigid plastic pet containers for air transport.

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The following guidance is a summary of the basic standards in the IATA Live Animals Regulations for transporting cats and dogs. The principles apply to other transport as well as by plane.

<b>Frame</b>	For containers made of wood, the outer frame should be made from timber at least 2.5 centimetres by 7.5 centimetres (1 inch by 3 inches) thick, and screwed or bolted together.
<b>Sides</b>	<p>The container must be smooth inside, with no pieces that the animal can bite or scratch to damage the unit.</p> <p>For wooden containers, use plywood which is at least 12mm (½ an inch) thick (or a similar material) to line the outer framework.</p> <p>The sides should be solid, but with enough ventilation.</p>
<b>Ends</b>	One whole end should be open and covered with bars, weldmesh or smooth expanded metal which is securely fixed so that the animal cannot move it.
<b>Floor</b>	The floor should be solid and leak-proof.
<b>Roof</b>	The roof should be solid but there can be ventilation holes over the whole surface as long as they do not affect the strength of the roof.

## Door

The door should make up one whole end of the container. It can either be sliding or hinged.

There must be a way to fasten and seal containers travelling to countries where this is needed.

Large doors will need extra hinges and two or three secure fasteners to be fully secure.

The door should be made of plastic, or welded or cast metal thick enough to prevent the animal from bending the door. Doors made of plastic material are only acceptable if the hinges and locking pins are made of thick enough metal. Many pet containers you can buy with plastic doors do not come with metal hinges.

For rigid plastic containers, the door hinges and locking pins should extend at least 1.6cm (5/8 of an inch) above and below the door opening.

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**Ventilation** You should provide an open end (which can be the door) and ventilation openings at least 2.5cm (1 inch) wide. These should cover the upper two thirds of the other end and the two sides, with 10cm (4 inches) between the centres of each opening.

For containers constructed specially for large dogs, you should cover the open end with closely-spaced metal bars or a double weldmesh with 1cm (½ an inch) between the meshes.

The total ventilated area should be at least 16% of the total surface of the four sides. You can provide more holes on the roof or sides of the container, or larger mesh-covered holes, to give the container better ventilation.

Your pet should not be able to get its nose or paws through the holes, and for cats and small dogs you may have to cover the holes with mesh. It is very important that ventilation holes do not give an animal a surface or edge at which it can gnaw or scratch.

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**Food and water** You should provide a spill-proof water container which can be filled from outside the container.

You should also provide a container for food.

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**Bedding** You must provide enough absorbent bedding for the journey.

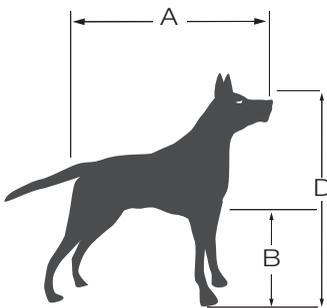
Newspaper alone is not enough for long journeys, but you can use several layers of it with other absorbent material, such as matting.

Containers for cats should have litter trays which are either heavy enough not to move around or fixed to stop them moving.

## Container measurements

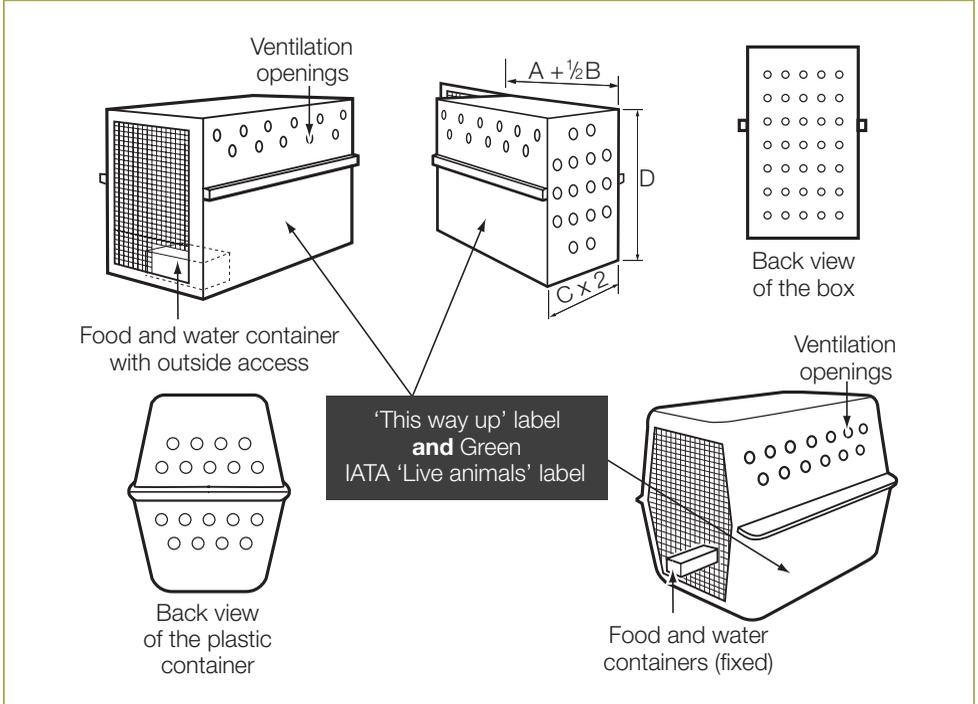
(All measurements are for the inside of the container.)

Size of animal	Size of container
A is the length of the animal from its nose to the base of the tail.	$A + \frac{1}{2} B =$ length of the container.
B is the height from the ground to the animal's elbow joint.	
C is the width across the widest part of the shoulders.	$C \times 2 =$ width of the container.
D is the height of the animal standing up naturally, from top of the head or the ear tip, whichever is higher.	$D =$ height of the container.



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## Examples of containers



By law, you must use the **'This way up'** label and **'Live animals'** label.

On planes, you must use a green IATA **'Live animals'** label and a **'This way up'** label.

## Who to contact

### In England

#### Animal Welfare Division

Defra

Branch B

1a Page Street

London SW1P 4PQ

Phone: +44 (0)20 7904 6577

Fax: +44 (0)20 7904 6961

E-mail: [aw-transport@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:aw-transport@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

Website:

[www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare](http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/welfare)

For more information on the law relating to animal transport, see the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997 on the website above.

#### Pet Travel Scheme (PETS)

Defra

Area 201

1a Page Street

London SW1P 4PQ

PETS Helpline: +44 (0)870 241 1710

Fax: +44 (0)20 7904 6206

E-mail: [pets.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:pets.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

Website: [www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/quarantine/pets/index.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/quarantine/pets/index.htm)

#### Defra Quarantine Section

State Veterinary Service

Animal Health Divisional Office

Beeches Road

Chelmsford

Essex CM1 2RU

Phone: +44 (0)1245 358 383

Fax: +44 (0)1245 351 162

E-mail: [quarantine@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:quarantine@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

Website: [www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/quarantine/index.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/quarantine/index.htm)

### In Scotland

#### Scottish Executive

Environment and Rural Affairs

Department

Animal Health and Welfare

Room 350

Pentland House

47 Robbs Loan

Edinburgh EH14 1TY

Phone: +44 (0)131 244 6181

Fax: +44 (0)131 244 6616

E-mail:

[animal.health@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:animal.health@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

### In Wales

#### Welsh Assembly Government

Animal Transport and ID

Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer

Caernarfon

Wales LL55 1EP

Phone: +44 (0)1267 245 002

E-mail:

[ocvoidandtrace@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ocvoidandtrace@wales.gsi.gov.uk)

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Published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Printed on recycled paper.

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