



TRAVEL TROUBLE: CANINE INFLUENZA AND KENNEL COUGH: SERIOUS, AVOIDABLE

10-Point Pet Care Checklist Promotes Peace-of-Mind

By Paul Mann

With all of the necessary catch up after your travels, a sick dog is the last thing you want to contend with. An ailing animal can also cut your long-planned, expensive vacation short should you need to come home early to nurse them back to good health. And, of course, you don't want your four-legged best friend to feel ill and achy—or suffer, and possibly lose, a battle with a life-threatening condition. In kind, pet owners must carefully consider their pet care options when they travel to best ensure Fido won't contract highly contagious and potentially deadly diseases, with canine influenza and kennel cough paramount among them.

With over 62 percent of U.S. households owning one or more pets and reports surfacing regularly of dogs contracting canine influenza—an easily transmitted and often lethal airborne virus—the concern is not to be taken lightly. For its part, kennel cough is the most prevalent infectious disease among dogs

and it, too, can result in fatal complications.

Canine influenza and kennel cough often occur in kennel, boarding and daycare facilities because one dog “plants” the disease and then multiple dogs have a high chance of coming in contact, contracting and further spreading the disease during the time they are kenneled—while they themselves suffer through the nasty symptoms. Panic surfaced this past August when a dog reportedly contracted canine influenza at a doggy daycare facility in New York, putting other dog owners throughout the city on high alert.

It's hard enough for owners to deal with the psychological concerns relating to boarding their pets in crowded facilities, but the physical health risks put a dog in double jeopardy. The good news is that precautions can be taken to keep dogs happy and well while their owners

are away for a short or extended period of time. There are, in fact, far safer and healthier alternatives to kennel, boarding and daycare facilities, which can also help give pet owners greater peace of mind when away from their four-legged friends.

Professional in-home pet sitting is one sound alternative to thwart pet illness, since most reputable pet care services typically visit with dogs in their own home and walk them one at a time or in very small groups. Another alternative is private boarding, whereby the dog enjoys “free range” comfort in the safety and comfort of a pet sitter's home. The better pet care services will also employ a large number of pet sitters to assure each staff member interacts with no more than 5 to 10 dogs in a day's time—even during busy holidays. This exposure is far less than the 50 to 150 dogs that might typically board together in a

kennel, boarding or daycare facility over a busy holiday season. Thus, the disease risk level for in-home pet sitting is considerably lower. Considering the overall savings in avoiding expensive veterinarian bills, and assuring both the physical and psychological health of pets, in-home pet sitting and private boarding are a much safer and cost-effective alternative to facility-based pet care all around.

To help pet owners avoid putting their beloved pets in dangerous health situations by using a professional pet sitter and dog walker, below are my “Top 10 Tips Assuring Pet Sitting Satisfaction”:

1. Locate a pet sitter in your area using a reputable source;
2. Diligently check all of the pet sitter's references—at least three should be voluntarily provided—and ensure you can find positive online reviews;
3. Confirm that your sitter has undergone a criminal background check and has received proper training;
4. Ensure the sitter offers a free in-home consultation and pre-interview the sitter with

your pet(s) present to observe interactions and establish a “comfort level” between you, the sitter and your pet(s);

5. Clearly state how you would like the sitter to use his/her visit time in terms of walking, playing, exercising, feeding, cleaning, etc.;
6. Verify that the sitter can accommodate your pet's daily feeding, walking and exercise schedule, as well as your desired vacation schedule, even during the busiest holidays;
7. Ensure the company offers 7-day-per-week telephone and email availability;
8. Provide medical and behavioral history about your pet(s) as well as veterinary and other emergency contact information, and gather all necessary supplies, including food, vitamins, and treats in one central location;
9. Ensure the company has “backup” measures in place should your primary pet sitter have an emergency that prevents them from performing your assignment;
10. Ensure the pet sitter is fully bonded and

insured and offers a satisfaction guarantee. The traveling public must not panic about reported cases of canine influenza or kennel cough outbreaks, but should diligently educate themselves regarding safe options for pet care. If in-home pet care is desired, it's also imperative to ensure the pet sitting professional is reputable and reliable. If a pet owner takes just a few relatively simple criteria into account before entrusting Fido to a pet sitter, they can enjoy peace of mind that their dog—and their home—will be well cared for.

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Sources:
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