

Holiday boarding brings relief and a little anxiety. You need someone to keep your dog safe, comfortable, and content while you travel, and the boarding provider needs clear, accurate information to do that job well. Safety at a kennel or pet hotel comes from preparation, informed facility selection, and realistic expectations. Below I outline the practical checks, paperwork, and conversations that keep dogs healthy during holiday boarding, along with trade-offs you will face when choosing options like short holiday boarding or long term boarding.

Why this matters Holiday periods concentrate demand. Facilities run near capacity, staff work longer shifts, and small mistakes compound into big problems. A missing vaccine record or an unlabeled bag can delay drop-off, make staff unsure about medication, or, worse, expose your dog to preventable disease. Planning reduces stress for you and for your dog, and it pays off with smoother handoffs and faster responses when something goes wrong.

Making the right facility choice Facility selection starts with a visit. Look for clean sightlines, confident staff, and routines that promote calm. Ask whether dogs are housed individually or in groups, how playtime is structured, and how often staff perform health checks. A facility that screens guests for temperament and vaccination status understands contagious risk and liability.

Observe how staff handle dogs. Do they bend at the knees and use calm voices? Do they respond quickly to questions? These details matter because staff skill and morale determine how a facility performs at peak times. A luxury boarding hotel with social rooms may be ideal for outgoing dogs, but those same spaces can be stressful for dogs who prefer quiet. For a senior dog or one with health issues, a smaller, clinic-affiliated place with private runs might be safer, because veterinary oversight is close at hand.

Check insurance and licenses. A facility should be able to show current licensing with local authorities and liability insurance. If they cannot produce this documentation, walk away. Licensing standards vary, but the presence of up-to-date permits is a basic indicator of regulatory compliance.

Vaccinations and disease control Vaccinations are the foundation of disease prevention in boarding settings. Most facilities require a core package: rabies, distemper/parvovirus (usually combined as DHPP), and Bordetella for respiratory protection. Some ask for canine influenza shots, particularly in areas with recent outbreaks. Ask the facility which vaccines they require and why. If a facility is lax about vaccination checks, they are likely lax about other important protocols.

Timing matters. Rabies schedules vary by jurisdiction, but boarding facilities typically require proof that three core vaccines are current. Bordetella is often required within the last 6 to 12 months, depending on the product used. If your dog receives a vaccine right before travel, expect a short waiting period for immunity to build; sometimes 48 hours is enough for certain vaccines, but for others a longer interval might be prudent. When uncertain, plan to update vaccines two to four weeks before boarding, not the day of drop-off.

Understand the trade-offs with kennel cough rules. Some facilities accept proof of a single intranasal Bordetella dose given the day before drop-off because intranasal vaccines give quicker local immunity. Others insist on injectable versions completed earlier. Intranasal vaccines can reduce immediate risk but sometimes cause mild discharge that staff must distinguish from true infection. Ask how the facility separates new arrivals and how they handle any dog with signs of respiratory illness.

IDs, microchips, and visible labels Proper identification reduces stress and prevents worst-case scenarios. Microchips remain the most reliable permanent ID. Confirm that your microchip is registered and your contact information is current. Many people move or change phone numbers and forget to update their chip record.

During holidays, flied phones and hotel stays can make reconnecting harder; make updating your chip a pre-trip task.

Visible IDs are practical too. Attach a collar tag with your current phone number and a local contact if you will not answer long-distance calls. At drop-off, ensure the facility affixes their own temporary tag that states your dog's name, any allergies, and the primary medication. This tag helps staff who are not yet familiar with your dog.

Bring two forms of ID to drop-off. A printed vaccination record and a recent photo of your dog are valuable. Photographs help staff recognize your dog among others and can speed reunification if a dog escapes during transport. Make sure the photo shows distinguishing markings and your dog facing the camera.

Emergency plans and veterinary access Ask about emergency procedures before you book. A good facility has written protocols for injuries, sudden illness, heat stress, and natural disasters. They can tell you where they take animals for off-hours emergency care and what the estimated transport time is. If the nearest 24-hour animal hospital is 30 minutes away, the facility should explain how they stabilize a dog and whether they will drive or call an ambulance service.

Discuss financial authorization in writing. Most facilities require a pre-authorized amount for emergency treatment and a signed consent to treat statement. Decide how much you are comfortable authorizing, knowing that advanced care can range from a few hundred dollars for simple treatments to several thousand if surgery is necessary. If you have firm limits, put them in writing and consider leaving a secondary contact authorized to make higher-cost decisions.

Communicate clear medical instructions. If your dog is on medication, write a schedule that includes dosage, timing, and how it is administered. Photograph the prescription label and include any syringe sizes used. If your dog refuses pills and you want staff to attempt pill hiding techniques before calling you, state that explicitly and outline acceptable substitutes. These details cut down on phone calls and speed care.

Daily routines and dog boarding schedule A predictable dog boarding schedule reduces stress. Dogs thrive on routine, especially in unfamiliar surroundings. Ask how the facility structures the day. Typical schedules include multiple potty breaks, at least two play or walk sessions, individualized feeding times, and a quiet period for rest. Learn the approximate length of supervised play sessions and the staff-to-dog ratio. For instance, a facility that offers group play might have one staff member per eight to ten dogs for large playgroups, but a calmer, smaller session will have fewer dogs per handler.

If your dog needs a stricter routine, like medication at 7 a.m. and 7 p.m., confirm the facility can meet those times. Ask whether staff will administer medications during staff meal breaks, and whether payment adjusts for additional handling. For dogs on a special feeding schedule, bring pre-portioned meals labeled with times. Facilities appreciate clarity because it reduces the potential for errors.

Packing smart: a short boarding packing guide

- collar and harness labeled with your dog's name and your phone number, plus a spare collar in a plastic bag
- pre-portioned, clearly labeled food in sealed bags with feeding instructions and preferred portion sizes
- all medications in original containers with dosing instructions and the prescribing veterinarian's contact
- one familiar blanket or bed-sized item and one small toy that can be washed, not anything expensive or irreplaceable
- a signed authorization and emergency contact sheet, including your primary and secondary phone numbers, a local emergency contact, and preferred veterinarian

Bring what reassures your dog, not everything you would at home. Duplicate items drive up the chance of lost belongings, so keep the packing list short and focused on essentials.

What to expect at drop-off Arrive early and calm. Staff are better equipped to handle a confident owner who provides information succinctly and responds calmly to questions. Walk staff through your dog's temperament: how they behave with other dogs, their triggers, any fears like thunderstorms, and how they usually ask to go out. Demonstrate how your dog takes medication if administration is complex. A 10 to 15 minute handoff interview can prevent misunderstandings.

Observe the intake process. A professional facility documents physical condition at arrival and notes any scratches, lumps, or behavioral issues. They will check the collar, verify vaccines, and mark your dog's belongings. If the intake skips any of these steps, ask why. A rushed intake during a busy holiday is not acceptable for a pet with health needs.

Handling heat, stress, and behavior Holiday boarding often coincides with travel seasons that include heat and thunderstorms. Ask the facility about climate control and cooling strategies. Temperatures inside runs should stay within a comfortable range, and there should be shaded outdoor areas for potty breaks. For brachycephalic breeds or older dogs, ask whether staff monitor for respiratory distress and whether the facility restricts strenuous play on hot days.

Stress manifests differently in dogs. Some whine; others withdraw or show changes in appetite. Facilities that perform daily temperament checks and log behavior changes are more likely to catch the early signs of distress. If your dog is especially anxious, consider pre-boarding familiarization visits or a shorter trial stay. For dogs with severe separation anxiety, long term boarding at a home-like environment or in-home pet sitting can be safer than busy group settings.

Costs and pricing considerations Boarding pricing varies widely. Expect basic kennel rates to start at modest daily fees, with additional charges for medication administration, walks, and playtime. Luxury pet hotels charge more for larger suites, webcams, and extra enrichment. Understand what is included: are feedings, basic grooming, and enrichment part of the base price, or are they add-ons?

When comparing pricing, check cancellation and holiday surcharges. Many facilities add 10 to 50 percent to rates during peak holidays. Some require a nonrefundable deposit for holiday boarding. If you must change plans, know the cancellation cutoff—often seven to 30 days—and any penalties assessed. A higher price does not guarantee better care, but unusually low pricing in a busy season often correlates with understaffing.

Long term boarding considerations Long term boarding, when your dog stays weeks or months, raises different safety questions. Evaluate staff turnover and continuity. High turnover means different people will handle your dog over time, which can be disruptive. Ask about transition plans for long term guests, such as periodic veterinary checks and individualized enrichment that prevents weight loss or behavioral decline.

For dogs on chronic medications or with ongoing conditions, choose a facility with veterinary oversight or a direct relationship with a clinic. Long term stays also require a financial plan. Facilities may offer tiered discounts for extended stays, but confirm whether they alter the daily routine or reduce one-on-one time as stays lengthen. A transparent facility will spell out what stays include and how care adapts after the initial two weeks.

Special cases: puppies, seniors, and medical needs Puppies and seniors need extra scrutiny. Puppies require vaccination schedules and socialization opportunities that match their immunization status. A facility should separate very young puppies from adult dogs and should not accept puppies until a safe vaccination threshold is reached, typically at least two weeks after the final set in a series. If your puppy needs socialization earlier, consider controlled play dates with known, vaccinated dogs or in-home care.

Seniors may have mobility issues and require softer bedding, more frequent restroom breaks, and medication management. Ask whether staff are trained in lifting aids and whether they can help [hip hounds grooming](#) with stairs or ramps. For dogs with chronic illnesses, get the facility's written protocol for disease monitoring, medication errors, and weight loss. Ask for daily notes and a plan for when to involve your regular veterinarian versus a facility-vetted ER.

Reunification and post-boarding check At pickup, perform a quick health check before you leave. Look for any new wounds, changes in coat condition, or obvious weight loss. Confirm medication continuity if you are resuming doses. Ask staff for a brief readout of behavior, appetite, and any issues during the stay. Facilities should provide a summary that notes when food was given, how many bathroom breaks occurred, and any medication times missed or refused.

If something seems off in the first 24 to 48 hours after your dog comes home, contact the boarding facility immediately and consider a vet visit. Sometimes stress reactions take a day to manifest, and early communication helps the facility review footage or staff notes to explain what happened.

Final recommendations Prepare documents and pack thoughtfully. Visit prospective facilities and watch how they run daily operations. Confirm vaccine requirements, microchip registration, and emergency veterinary access. Plan for realistic pricing and know what you will authorize in an emergency.

Holiday travel should feel like a relief, not a gamble. With clear communication, updated IDs, and an emergency plan, you put your dog in the best position to return healthy and calm. If you have an unusually anxious or medically complex dog, consider a trial stay before a long holiday, and prioritize facilities with veterinary partnerships. These steps prevent last-minute surprises and keep the holiday focused on rest and reunion.

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