

# Standards of Care for Shelter Animals



*Objective: to establish standards of care for animals housed in public and private shelters.*

## Introduction

No one likes to see animals warehoused in public and private shelters. But while they are awaiting adoption, return to owner, rescue, or euthanasia, the animals must be cared for. Meeting basic standards of care to make these animals as comfortable as possible should be the goal of every shelter in the state.

Therefore, the Federation of Humane Organizations of West Virginia (FOHO WV) urges all shelter managers and staff, both public and private, to review their management policies to ensure the animals in their shelters are being cared for humanely.

## Health standards

**Vaccinations.** Upon entry into a shelter, each animal should be vaccinated to prevent the outbreak of deadly diseases. The core vaccinations for cats are: feline viral rhinotracheitis, calicivirus, panleukopenia (FVRCP). For dogs: distemper, hepatitis, parainfluenza, and canine parvovirus (DHPP)/distemper, adenovirus 2, parvovirus, and parainfluenza virus (DA2PP) and Bordetella bronchiseptica. Modified live virus vaccines are recommended because they provide a faster immune response.

Rabies vaccination is not considered a core vaccination as the risk of this disease is not prevalent in most shelters. However, if an animal is to

remain in a shelter for an indefinite period of time, rabies vaccination is encouraged. At a minimum, all animals should be vaccinated for rabies at or shortly following their release from the shelter.

Additionally, upon entry, all animals should be checked for parasites and treated according to standard veterinary practices.

**Spaying/neutering** cats and dogs is essential to stemming the tide of unwanted animals winding up in shelters. Spaying/neutering shelter animals makes them more comfortable in a group environment and often makes them more adoptable.

Plus, according to West Virginia Code 19-20B-2, all animals being adopted from a shelter must be spayed or neutered prior to adoption or the adopter must sign a written agreement stating that he or she will have the animal spayed or neutered by a licensed veterinarian. Spaying/neutering before adoption insures the animal will not have a chance to reproduce.

## Physical care

**Isolate to examine.** Animals entering a shelter should be isolated from the general population until they have been fully vetted and quarantined for the appropriate time based on sound veterinary practices. Animals should be routinely monitored for any changes in their physical well-being.

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The Federation of Humane Organizations of West Virginia, INC. website promoting animal welfare throughout the state.

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**Protocols** should be in place to manage animals who display deterioration in their health. Protocols also should be in place in the event of a sudden injury or sickness.

All shelter animals should be provided with prompt and appropriate **veterinary care** which may include pain management and the alleviation of suffering, antibiotics, fluid therapy, cage rest, and other medically necessary support.

**Clean and fresh food and water.** All animals should have easy access to appropriate food that is nutritionally sound and suitable to their age, breed, size, and physical condition. The food should be fresh and free of bacteria. They should also have access to potable, clean, fresh water.

Food and water dishes should be non-breakable and sanitized daily. Food not eaten after a reasonable time should be thrown out. All food should be stored in safe containers to prevent contamination. Protocols should be established for the feeding of sick, injured, and infant animals.

**Grooming** is essential to the well-being of shelter animals. Upon intake, all animals should be checked for fleas and ticks. Animals who are matted should be groomed to remove the matts or shaved down. Animals should have their claws clipped and their ears cleaned. Animals in need of a bath should be given one shortly after entry and as needed during their stay in the shelter. Keeping an animal clean not only makes the animal more desirable for adoption but improves his or her wellbeing and health.

## Housing

There are pros and cons regarding separate cages vs. group housing. In group housing, animals can socialize and play with each other, which can cut down on boredom. The animals have an opportunity for companionship and physical connection not just with their own species but with humans who enter the space.

However, if some animals are shy or undersocialized, they may feel threatened in an open environment. In addition, not all shelters have the building capacity for group housing or the staff who can monitor and keep safe all those in the group.

**Cages** should be sufficient in size for the species, breed, and number of animals to be housed in each cage. Overcrowding in cages can result in fights, poor mental and physical health, and deterioration in the ability of the animal to function.

**Enrichment** helps reduce stress in animals housed in a shelter, whether in group housing or in cages. Enrichment is not an optional component of shelter management, but rather it is as important as nutrition and veterinary care.

Giving cats the chance to use scratching materials and dogs the opportunity to chew on dog-safe toys

will stimulate the animals and give them something to do while confined in the shelter. Playing, walking, grooming, and petting all contribute to the mental and emotional stimulation of animals and can aid them in their reaching optimum health and wellbeing.

For puppies and kittens, **socialization** is essential; for without it, they may develop a fear of their environment and people, making them less desirable for adoption.

## Environmental standards

**Sanitary and inviting.** The interior and exterior of the shelter should be kept free of debris. The shelter should have a welcoming approach so that adopters feel invited to enter. The building inside should be kept free of parasites, pests, rodents, etc., that might carry diseases.

All cages and group housing rooms should be cleaned daily at a minimum both for sanitary reasons and to prevent the spread of disease.

Cleaning also ensures a welcoming environment to the public.

**Remove occupants to clean cages.** Animals should be removed from their cages when they are being cleaned. No animal should be exposed to cleaning solutions or water from hoses.

## Conclusion

West Virginia Code 7-1-14. Custody and care of animals abandoned, neglected or cruelly treated; animals causing public nuisance, health risk or safety hazard; authority of county commission identifies the responsibilities for housing animals.

This enabling code, which FOHO WV encourages each jurisdiction to adopt, requires:

(1) *Adequate food in sufficient quantity*

*and nutritive value to maintain each animal in good health;*

(2) *Adequate water which provides easy access to clean, fresh, potable water of a drinkable temperature in sufficient volume and suitable intervals to maintain normal hydration for each animal;*

(3) *Adequate shelter to protect the animal from the elements and other animals;*

(4) *Adequate space in the primary enclosure for the particular animal depending upon its age, size, species and weight which is regularly cleaned to prevent an unsanitary accumulation of urine and feces;*

(5) *Adequate exercise to assure that the animal maintains normal muscle tone and mass for the age, species, size and condition of the animal; and*

(6) *Veterinary care when needed or to prevent suffering or disease transmission.*

This is the least we can do for the animals housed in public and private shelters in our state.

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## Endnotes

Most of the information in this article is taken from *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters*, The Association of Shelter Veterinarians 2010 (<http://sheltervet.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Shelter-Standards-Oct2011-wForward.pdf>)

WV State Code: [www.legis.state.wv.us/WVCODE/Code.cfm](http://www.legis.state.wv.us/WVCODE/Code.cfm)

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