



ANIMAL WELL-BEING

Dogs

Authors:
Jacquelyn Jacobs
Department of
Animal Science,
Michigan State University,
and
Marisa Erasmus
Department of
Animal Sciences,
Purdue University

Quick facts about dogs

- There are over 150 breeds of dogs.
- Through the process of domestication, dogs have acquired the ability to digest starch.
- Dogs are uniquely attuned to identifying human body language and facial expressions – more so than any other non-human animal.
- The average dog understands hundreds of human words.
- A border collie named Chaser had a “vocabulary” equivalent to a 3- or 4-year-old human child.

What is animal well-being?

Animal well-being, or animal welfare, is the ability of an animal to cope with its environment and living conditions. It's more than simply being healthy. Animal well-being includes:

1. An animal's feelings or emotions, such as contentment;
2. An animal's ability to perform natural behavior, such as grooming, stretching and turning around fully;
3. An animal's health and biological functioning, such as not having injuries or disease.

Signs of poor dog well-being

Changes in your dog's behavior can alert you to a possible problem. A dog that is sick or injured may have the following signs:

- Refusing food, or eating less than normal
- Drinking more or less water than normal
- Sleeping a lot; not wanting to move
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea, or lack of bowel movements
- Shaking
- Fever
- Difficulty walking, or limping
- Woozy or strange body movements
- Licking one area for a long time
- Coughing or sneezing
- Dull or missing fur
- Panting when not hot or excited

Causes of poor dog well-being

These situations or conditions can compromise animal well-being and cause suffering:

Neglect: failing to care for a dog, and:

- Not providing necessities (food, water, shelter).
- Keeping a dog in a way that might endanger the dog's health or life.
- Ignoring injury, sickness or disease without contacting a veterinarian.

Abandonment: deserting the dog without providing means for long-term care.

Cruelty or abuse: causing physical or mental harm, pain or suffering.

Avoid causing:

- Negative feelings, such as pain or fear
- Thirst or hunger

- Discomfort from long-term restraint
- Illness, injury or disease
- Discomfort, pain, or death from prolonged exposure to high or low temperatures

Caring for dogs

Provide fresh, clean water.

- Water should never be frozen.

Provide good quality nutrition and daily meals. Consult your veterinarian for nutrition advice based on your dog's life stage and current body condition.

- Ideally, dogs should have an obvious waist and minimal fat cover, but not be thin enough to see hip bones or spine.

Provide opportunities for exercise.

Provide housing or shelter that:

- Has a comfortable space to lie down
- Has a separate space for bathroom behavior
- Protects against extreme weather conditions. Dogs are most comfortable at temperatures between 68 and 86°F, but this varies depending on the breed of dog. Levels of humidity and air flow also affect the dog's thermal comfort level.

Interact with your dog in a positive way, such as playing, petting, or walking them on a leash.

Train your dog using positive reinforcement.

- For example, give them a treat after sitting.

Observe their normal behavior and watch for changes (which might suggest they are hurt or ill)

Contact your veterinarian if you think your dog may be hurt or sick.

When to be concerned

Aggression: a behavior that can cause injury.

Recognizing early warning signs can help prevent harm (in other words, biting or snapping):

- Posture: Stiff, tense body; upright and “tall.”
- Tail: held upright and stiff, may be wagging.



- Behavioral signs: growling, hair raised between shoulder blades, staring, whites of eyes showing, tense lips, showing teeth (look for these behaviors in the photo, above).

Fear: can lead to aggression.

A fearful dog will:

- Posture: try to make itself appear smaller, and may crouch or cower.
- Tail position: tuck their tail between their legs (if possible).
- Ear position: pull their ears back with tension in the forehead, or pin ears against their head.
- Behavioral signs: have exaggerated yawns, avoid eye contact, pant when not hot, hide.

Do you have an animal well-being concern?

Call your local police department or veterinarian.

For livestock and poultry concerns, contact the Indiana State Board of Animal Health (BOAH) <http://www.in.gov/boah/>