



Code of Practice for the Private Keeping of Dogs

On this page

- [1. Preface](#)
- [2. Purpose of the Code](#)
- [3. Introduction](#)
- [4. Definitions](#)
- [5. Legal responsibilities](#)
- [6. Owner responsibilities](#)
- [7. Nutrition](#)
- [8. Water](#)
- [9. Health and disease](#)
- [10. Breeding and reproduction](#)
- [11. Surgical procedures](#)
- [12. Housing](#)
- [13. Transport](#)
- [14. Training, socialisation and exercise](#)
- [15. Injury and other potential welfare risks for dogs](#)
- [16. What if you are unable to keep your dog?](#)
- [17. Euthanasia](#)
- [18. Further reading](#)
- [Appendix 1: Organisations that can provide further information](#)
- [Appendix 2: Indicators of dog health status](#)
- [Appendix 3: Body condition chart — dogs](#)
- [Appendix 4: Minimum enclosure sizes for housing per adult dog](#)

1. Preface

The [Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986](#) [↗] came into force on 20 May 1986 and is administered by the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR). It has the purpose of protecting animals, encouraging the considerate treatment of animals and improving the level of community awareness about the prevention of cruelty to animals.

It establishes fundamental obligations relating to the care of animals in general terms. Details of obligations are found in codes of practice that are made under the provisions of the Act. These set out minimum standards and recommendations relating to important aspects of the care of animals.

They are developed following a process of consultation with stakeholders and the community.

Codes reflect the views and values held by most Victorians with respect to the care of animals. It is recommended that all those who care for animals become familiar with the relevant codes.

This code was initiated by the Bureau of Animal Welfare and prepared in consultation with an advisory committee. This committee was comprised of persons who have knowledge and expertise in particular areas such as animal welfare, veterinary science, the commercial use of animals and the standards and conduct of ethical use of animals.

2. Purpose of the Code

This Code is made under the provisions of the [Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986](#).

The Code and its provisions are to be observed by owners, carers and custodians of dogs.

This Code of Practice is intended to provide the minimum standards of accommodation, management and care appropriate to the physical and behavioural requirements of dogs.

Other codes relevant to the welfare of dogs include:

[Domestic Animals Act 1994](#) mandatory codes:

- [Code of Practice for the Operation of Breeding and Rearing Establishments](#)
- [Code of Practice for the Operation of Boarding Establishments](#)
- [Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and Pounds](#)
- [Code of Practice for the Operation of Pet Shops](#)
- [Code of Practice for the Operation of Dog Training Establishments](#)
- Code of Practice for the Operation of Greyhound Establishments.

[Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986](#) codes:

- [Code of Practice for the Tethering of Animals](#)
- [Code of Practice for the Debarking of Dogs.](#)

This Code of Practice reflects current knowledge and opinion and aims to promote better dog welfare by providing education and minimum standards for dog owners.

3. Introduction

Dogs have been associated with humans for over 10,000 years and have been developed into about 400 breeds worldwide. Domestic dogs are a truly domesticated animal in that their breeding, care and feeding are more or less totally controlled by humans. The domestic dogs' habitat is now among humans with many dogs living in suburbia.

In Australia, 37% of households have a pet dog and dogs are an integral part of our society. As well as being valuable companions, they are also found serving as working partners, herding dogs, substance detector dogs, guard dogs, guide dogs for the blind and in more recent times, hearing dogs and helper dogs.

The health benefits to people from pet ownership are well known. Dogs are excellent animals to keep as a pet providing valuable companionship to owners. However owners need to understand their dog's requirements and ensure they provide the proper care and protection to ensure a happy and healthy life for their pet.

Anyone considering owning a dog should read this Code and ensure they can meet these minimum standards before undertaking ownership of a dog.

4. Definitions

For the purposes of this Code the following definitions apply:

Bitch: means an entire female dog of breeding age

Dangerous dog means:

(a) a dog which has been declared to be dangerous by a Council under Part 3 of the Domestic Animals Act 1994.

(b) a dog which by virtue of the operation of section 34A of the Domestic Animals Act 1994 is a dangerous dog.

Domestic Animal Business means:

- (a) an animal shelter, council pound or pet shop; or
- (b) a dog rearing, training or boarding enterprise that is run for profit; or
- (c) a dog breeding enterprise that sells dogs where:
 - the enterprise has 3 or more fertile female dogs; or
 - the enterprise has 10 or more fertile female dogs but the owner is a member of an applicable organisation under the Domestic Animals Act 1994.

Menacing dog: means a dog which has been declared to be a menacing dog by a Council under Part 3 of the Domestic Animals Act 1994.

Owner: includes any person who owns, has care or custody, or keeps or harbours a dog for the time being whether the dog is at large or in confinement.

Restricted breed dog: means a dog that is any one of the following breeds -

- (a) Japanese Tosa
- (b) Fila Brasileiro
- (c) Dogo Argentino
- (d) Perro de Presa Canario (or Presa Canario)
- (e) American Pit Bull Terrier (or Pit Bull Terrier).

A dog that falls within the approved standard for one of the above breeds is to be taken to be a dog of that breed.

Veterinarian: means a registered veterinary practitioner.

Note: Changes to the definitions in this document have been made in line with recent legislative changes to the Domestic Animals Act 1994. To view the current Gazetted version of the code please view Government Gazette No 46, 15 November 2007.

5. Legal responsibilities

The [Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986](#) sets out the offences for failing to properly care and provide for a dog. This legislation includes requirements such as provision of proper and sufficient food, water, shelter and veterinary treatment (see relevant sections of code for details).

This Act also covers offences such as deliberate cruelty, ill-treatment, causing unnecessary or unreasonable pain or suffering, abandonment and transport of dogs on moving vehicles.

The [Domestic Animals Act 1994](#) sets out requirements such as registration, confinement and identification of dogs and the powers of local Councils to ensure these requirements are met. It also covers dog attacks and sets out the declaration and keeping of dangerous, restricted and menacing dogs including specific requirements for their identification, enclosures and fencing, muzzling and property signage. Dogs that attack either humans or other animals can, in specified circumstances, be declared as dangerous or be euthanased.

Minimum standards

- Owners must provide their dog with proper and sufficient food, water, shelter and veterinary treatment.
- Dogs must be treated humanely.
- Found or stray dogs in the possession of a person other than the owner must be handed over to the local Council as soon as possible.
- Dog fighting or luring (with live animals) is illegal.

- Dogs must be microchipped where required by legislation.

Owners must abide by legislative requirements including:

- dogs must be registered with, and identified as required by, the local Council
- dogs must be confined to their property
- dogs must not be allowed to create a nuisance problem e.g. constant barking
- dogs must be leashed in public places (as required by legislation or local laws)
- requirements for dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs must be complied with

Recommended best practice

All dogs should be microchipped to ensure they are permanently identified.

Owner contact details need to be kept up to date with the microchip registry.

Guidelines

Local Councils or animal welfare shelters should be contacted promptly in regard to lost dogs to see if they have been found and impounded. It is important to start looking for a missing dog immediately, as pounds are only required to hold stray and impounded dogs for 8 days, after which they may be euthanased or rehoused.

It is a legal requirement to hand over stray dogs as soon as possible to the local Council as they are the first point of call for any owner who has lost their dog. They will check the dog for identification, such as a registration tag or microchip, which can identify the owner. Just because a dog is straying does not mean it is unowned or unwanted.

Councils have specific local laws and orders regarding dog management and dog owners need to be aware of these and abide by them. Local laws or orders cover issues such as numbers of dogs allowed per property, requirements for leashing in public places and picking up and disposal of a dog's faeces deposited in public areas.

6. Owner responsibilities

Minimum standards

Owners are responsible for the health and welfare of their dog(s) and must provide both the basic necessities and a good quality of life for their dog(s).

Recommended best practice

Choose a breed or type most suitable to your lifestyle and circumstances. When selecting a new dog the following factors should be considered:

- size of the adult dog
- breed temperament
- known breed problems such as, breed associated genetic disorders that may develop later in life — ensure parents have been tested for such disorders where possible
- exercise requirements for the breed or type of dog (often corresponds to dog 'type' rather than size — hunting or working breeds generally have greater exercise requirements regardless of size)
- activity level of dog
- grooming requirements
- ease of training and skills of owner or handler
- dog type — working, guard, retriever
- cost of care and feeding

Dogs should be de-sexed from 8 weeks of age by a veterinarian to prevent indiscriminate breeding and for the dog's health and welfare. If a dog is not desexed owners need to take steps to ensure that it will not be able to breed unwanted litters i.e. confine bitches when on heat. Males should be desexed to prevent

nuisance behaviours such as, urine marking habits, reduce fighting and prevent siring of litters.

Dogs should be kept on a leash at all times when off private property unless in a designated off lead area.

Appropriate training and socialisation should be provided for dogs to prevent nuisance or destructive behaviours developing (such as continual barking or digging).

Guidelines

Good dog welfare depends on owner and handler competency. Owners need to understand and provide appropriate care, handling and management requirements for their dog.

Expert advice is readily available from veterinarians, local Councils and organisations such as animal welfare organisations, the Victorian Canine Association, breed societies and dog obedience clubs (see Appendix 1). A list of further reading material on dogs is included later in this Code (see section 18).

7. Nutrition

Minimum standards

- Dogs must be fed a diet that provides proper and sufficient food to maintain good health and meet their physiological requirements.
- Puppies from 6 weeks to 6 months of age must be fed a minimum of 2 meals per day.
- All dogs, but especially any that may receive offal as part of their diet must be given regular treatment to control intestinal

Recommended best practice

Dogs need to be fed a well-balanced diet to maintain health, vitality and body weight in the correct range for their breed and age (see body condition categories section below and Appendix 3).

Adult dogs should be fed once a day. Where dogs are fed more than once a day then individual meals need to be sufficient to ensure daily requirements are met but not exceeded, to avoid development of obesity. It may also be better to feed deep chested large breed dogs a number of smaller meals daily to help prevent the incidence of 'bloat' or 'gastric torsion'.

A dog's body condition needs to be monitored regularly to ensure its diet is adequate, and dogs should be maintained in the 'ideal' body condition range (see body condition categories section below and Appendix 3).

Factors such as size, age and life stage of the dog, activity level, medical requirements, and climate all impact on the diet required by a dog. At different life stages, or levels of activity, dogs may require food of differing nutritional value rather than just a greater or lesser volume. For this reason it is not possible to provide simple guidelines on how much or what to feed individual dogs.

During pregnancy the nutritional requirements of the pregnant bitch will alter and additional nutrition may be required. It is important that the body condition of the bitch is maintained within the ideal body weight range to avoid the development of metabolic diseases. Lactating bitches also have increased nutritional requirements and therefore require improved nutrition to enable them to maintain body weight while feeding pups.

Puppies have special feeding requirements and require more food (per kilogram of body weight) because in addition to requiring energy for maintenance and activity they need extra nutrients for growth. A number of small meals need to be provided daily as their daily requirement of food is greater than their stomach can accept in one feed. At weaning, puppies should be provided with 3 to 4 meals spread evenly throughout the day. This can be reduced to 2 to 3 meals per day at around 16 weeks of age and then to the single meal of the adult dog at around 6 to 9 months of age. These changes may need to occur later in large breed pups as they take longer to mature.

Puppies should be fed on commercial puppy food or a balanced diet specially formulated and discussed with a veterinarian to ensure all nutrient requirements are being met. Poor nutrition during this growth stage can create health or skeletal problems in later life.

Dogs should be fed raw bones regularly as part of a balanced diet and for good dental health. Cooked bones should not be fed as they can splinter and lodge in a dog's throat or intestine causing serious health problems, such as severe constipation, and are not digested. Some dogs may have trouble with chewing bones and these dogs need to be provided with an alternative chewing item in order to maintain good dental health (seek advice from a veterinarian).

A separate food bowl needs to be provided for each dog and should be maintained in a clean condition.

Offal should not be fed to dogs because of the risk of transfer of hydatid tapeworms from offal (animal body organs) to dogs and subsequent risk of transfer to humans (which can cause serious and potentially fatal illness). If offal is fed it should first be well cooked or deep frozen to kill any parasites and dogs given regular treatment for hydatids and other intestinal worms.

Guidelines

The majority of dogs are normal, healthy, non-working, non-breeding animals. These are by far the easiest to feed, having the least demanding nutrient requirements, and in general the main nutritional concern is overfeeding and obesity rather than nutrient deficiencies.

The appropriate amounts of protein, fat, vitamins and minerals will be provided by a complete commercial dog food. Alternatively a properly balanced home-prepared diet can be provided. If a home-prepared diet is being fed a veterinarian should be consulted to ensure the dog is getting all the necessary nutrients it requires to maintain good health.

The quantity of food required is usually indicated on the food package label, expressed in relation to the dog's body weight and breed type, e.g. toy, small, medium, large, giant. Caution should be applied however as the suggested amounts may not be appropriate for every dog. Different brands and types of dog food (canned, semi-moist and dry) have different levels of nutrients so the amount of food can also alter when you change types or brands of food.

Feeding an inappropriate diet to dogs can cause metabolic disease, vomiting or diarrhoea or problems such as skin disorders. Veterinary advice should be sought where such problems are suspected.

Obesity is a major health and welfare problem for dogs, which is often not recognised by owners. It is important to regularly assess whether a dog is receiving too little or too much food by its body condition and weight. By monitoring a dog's body condition their diet can be adjusted to ensure they are maintained in good condition without becoming overweight.

Guidelines for checking if your dog is at an ideal weight

Check your dog's ribs. First, stand above the dog and look down at it. Behind the ribs there should be a visible indentation — a 'waist'. Next, place both your hands either side of the chest on the dog's ribs. You should be able to feel them but other than the last three (3) ribs they shouldn't be visible.

Body condition categories

| Condition | Description |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Underweight | Ribs are easily felt and seen, no fat felt under the skin. |
| Ideal | Outline of the ribs is easily felt. Dog has a waist when viewed from above, and if viewed from the side, the belly is tucked up. |

| Condition | Description |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Overweight | Ribs cannot be easily felt. Dog has no waist when viewed from above and if viewed from the side the belly is rounded. |

*Refer to Appendix 3 for diagrams of body condition categories for dogs. In general dogs should be maintained in an 'ideal' body condition.

In general dogs should be maintained in an 'ideal' body condition. Underweight and overweight dogs can have serious health and welfare problems and veterinary advice should be sought for these dogs.

Weigh your dog

A veterinarian can weigh a dog on a platform scale, specifically designed for pets. Small-sized dogs can also be weighed on scales at home. A veterinarian can help determine a dog's optimum weight.

This will differ for each dog depending on the dog's size, activity level and stage of life. Alternatively, general weight ranges for different breeds are normally available through the internet, breed books or breed societies and these weight ranges can be used as a guide.

It can be more difficult to visually monitor the weight of longhaired dogs so it is important to regularly physically check these dogs' body condition.

It is easier to perform a visual check on a longhaired dog after bathing or swimming or whenever the coat is wet.

Moist or semi-moist food should not be left out ad lib as it spoils easily and will attract flies and vermin.

If there is any doubt about the appropriate feeding of a dog, advice should be obtained from a veterinarian.

8. Water

Minimum standards

- Dogs must have access to clean drinking water at all times.
- Water containers must be checked daily and maintained in a clean condition.

Recommended best practice

Water containers provided should not be easily tipped over and should be large enough or refilled often enough to provide access to water twenty-four (24) hours a day.

Water containers should be of a design that is easily cleaned and does not cause injury to the dog.

If puppies are present, the container should not be so large or deep that they can fall in and drown.

Guidelines

As a general guide, the amount of water needed daily by an adult dog is 50ml water per 1kg of body weight (more for a lactating bitch).

An individual dog's daily water requirement depends on a number of factors including daily temperature, amount of exercise, water content of diet; for example, greater water requirements if fed dry food compared to canned food, age.

9. Health and disease

Minimum standards

- A dog's health and welfare must be checked daily.
- Veterinary advice must be promptly sought for dogs showing signs of injury, ill health or distress.
- Dogs must be treated regularly for internal and external parasites and vaccinated against common diseases.

Recommended best practice

A daily health check should include examining the dog's physical condition, checking for signs of ill health and that the dog is eating, drinking, toileting and behaving normally. (Refer 'indicators of health' checklist in Appendix 2 for details).

It is important to present sick or unwell animals for examination early in the course of a disease as this gives the veterinarian the best opportunity to quickly return the pet to good health.

Dogs should receive an annual health check by a veterinarian. More frequent checks may be needed for older dogs or those with health/welfare problems.

Regular vaccinations for the control of contagious diseases, as well as preventative treatments for internal, such as worms and external fleas and parasites, need to be provided to safeguard the general health of dogs. Frequency of treatment depends on the product used and life stage of the dog.

Puppies should be vaccinated (at least 8 days prior to rehoming), wormed and desexed before going to a new home. They require a course of vaccinations from 6 to 8 weeks of age. They also need more frequent worming than adults, starting at around 2 weeks of age. Seek veterinary advice regarding vaccination and worming regimes.

Dogs should receive regular check ups of their teeth for dental problems and be fed raw bones or other appropriate chewing or teeth cleaning substitutes to help prevent dental problems from occurring. Talk to a veterinarian for advice or dental health.

Dogs should be groomed regularly especially breeds with a long or thick coat. Severe matting of the coat is not acceptable and may require a veterinarian or experienced groomer to deal with this. To avoid this matting of the coat dogs require regular grooming, shampooing and routine clipping (this should be done by a veterinarian or experienced person).

If a dog's claws are too long they should be trimmed. However, if this is not done correctly it can cause bleeding so a veterinarian or an experienced person should undertake this procedure. Flea allergies, mange and other skin disorders need special treatment. Early diagnosis and treatment by a veterinarian is important for dogs suffering these problems.

Keep any poisons or chemicals used in the house, garden or work place stored away from any areas which a dog may have access to as these can be attractive to dogs. Most common poisonings of dogs are a result of them having access to snail or rodent poisons. Dogs are particularly susceptible to 1080 poisoning so extra care should be taken to confine dogs to properties and away from areas where poisoning programs for pest animals are occurring.

Dogs with white hair, or white or non-pigmented nose, eyelids or ears can be prone to sunburn and skin cancers. Precautions, such as use of sunscreen, should be taken to protect the vulnerable areas or alternatively keep dogs indoors or in shaded areas during the heat of the day.

Guidelines

Some animal diseases and parasites are transferable to humans (zoonoses) so it is important that those handling dogs practice good personal hygiene.

Dogs can appear quite resilient to pain and may just go quiet or hide as a response to injury or disease. This does not mean that they are not in pain or injured. Abnormal behaviours can indicate underlying health problems.

Seek advice from a veterinarian where such behaviours are identified.

Human medicines should not be given to dogs except on veterinary advice as they can be harmful.

10. Breeding and reproduction

Minimum standards

- A breeding dog must be fit, healthy and free of disease.
- Dogs with a known history of physical or genetic defects (that will affect the dog or its progeny's quality of life) must not be used for breeding.
- Females must not be bred before they are 12 months old, to ensure they are physically fully grown.
- Veterinary advice must be sought immediately if there are any concerns about a pregnancy or labour.
- Puppies must not be separated from the mother before 7 weeks of age and not be sold or given away until 8 weeks of age or older.

Recommended best practice

If it is not intended to use a male or female dog for responsible breeding purposes, they should be desexed by a veterinarian. Desexing can be done safely from 8 weeks of age and preferably before puberty (4 to 6 months).

Before breeding, dogs should be health-checked by a veterinarian. This will include checking for any known breed genetic defects (that will affect the dog or its progeny's quality of life).

Inherited defects may detract from the dog's overall health and cause pain or discomfort that cannot be cured and animals with such defects should not be bred from.

Regardless of breed, bitches should be at least 12 months old and in their second season before being mated for the first time. For the larger dog breeds, the recommended age for first breeding is generally 18 months old, when the bitch is fully grown and mature.

Bitches should not be mated to have more than two litters in an 18-month period. For the larger breeds, this should be not more than 2 litters per 24 month period.

Guidelines

Desexing has positive welfare and health benefits for dogs as well as reducing any tendency to stray, particularly in male dogs. Dogs do not 'need' to have a litter of puppies for their psychological or physical welfare.

If you intend to breed from a dog, contact a veterinarian to obtain information on health, nutrition and birth procedures. Dog associations such as Dogs Victoria can also assist with information on responsible breeding.

Gestation (pregnancy) is generally about nine weeks. A pregnant bitch has increased health requirements and requires regular veterinary checks during the pregnancy.

A suitable warm and protected environment should be provided for the bitch to give birth. Most bitches will complete labour in around 6 hours with no more than one hour between pups. If the bitch or pups appear distressed or there seems to be delays in the labour contact a veterinarian promptly.

Owners inexperienced in the birthing of bitches should seek advice from their veterinarian or an experienced breeder and preferably have an experienced person present.

Contact a veterinarian if there are any concerns over the labour.

11. Surgical procedures

Minimum standards

- A registered veterinarian must carry out any surgical procedures on a dog, such as desexing or dewclaw removal.
- Ear cropping and tail docking of dogs are illegal procedures and must not be done unless carried out by a registered veterinarian for therapeutic reasons.
- Debarking of dogs must only be done as a last resort to prevent nuisance behaviour. Debarking can only be done by a registered veterinarian in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Debarking of Dogs.

12. Housing

Minimum standards

- Dogs must be provided with a weatherproof sleeping area and shelter from sun, wind and rain.
- Kennels must be large enough for the dog to stand, turn around and lie comfortably.
- Dogs must be confined to the property at all times, unless under the effective control of the owner or handler.
- The area a dog is confined to must have secure fencing that the dog cannot get over, under or through.
- Where dogs are housed in enclosures or restricted areas they must meet the minimum size requirements as listed in Appendix 4.
- Enclosures need to allow dog(s) to move around freely, to urinate and defecate away from the sleeping and eating areas and be cleaned daily so that enclosures are free of faeces.
- Vehicles must not be used as permanent housing for dogs.
- Each dog must have its own sleeping area and food bowl.
- Dogs must be given adequate daily exercise outside of enclosures.
- Adequate ventilation must be provided if dogs are housed in enclosed areas or buildings.
- All housing areas for dogs must be maintained in a safe, clean and hygienic condition at all times.

The following requirements are part of the Code of Practice for the Tethering of Animals:

- Tethered dogs must be trained to accept tethering and require greater supervision and owner vigilance than other untethered animals.
- Water and weatherproof shelter must be available and within the dog's reach at all times.
- Collars must be fitted with a swivel to which the tether is attached and be checked daily.
- Dogs less than four months old, bitches in season and bitches about to give birth must not be tethered.
- Dogs must not be tethered to movable objects or adjacent to a fence in a manner that places them at danger of death by hanging.
- Dogs must be given regular daily exercise off the tether.

Recommended best practice

Suitable accommodation and carers must be provided for dogs when owners are away, such as boarding kennels that are registered with the local Council or ensure a responsible person is providing the necessary daily care for the dog.

Fencing of yards or enclosures should meet the following requirements:

- a minimum height of 1.8 metres (shorter fencing may be suitable for small dogs or dogs which are unable to climb or jump, however the height of the fence needs to be sufficient to contain the dogs on the property)
- where 1.8 metre height is not sufficient to contain the dogs, an inwardfacing overhang of 0.7 metres angled at 35 degrees to the horizontal plane can be used to prevent dogs escaping over the top of fencing
- a minimum area as shown in Appendix 4 (at least one-third of the minimum area should be weatherproof)
- constructed of brick, concrete, timber, iron or similar solid materials, or chain mesh manufactured from 3.15 mm wire to form a uniform 50mm mesh, or weldmesh manufactured from 4 mm wire with a maximum mesh spacing of 50 mm, or any combination of those materials (ensure materials used also comply with local Council requirements)
- constructed and maintained in a manner which prevents the dog from being able to dig or otherwise escape under, over or through the perimeter of the premises or enclosure
- for dogs that dig or escape under fencing — concrete footings or wire buried into the ground should be used
- designed to prevent children from climbing into the premises or enclosure

Where more than one dog is housed in an enclosure, ensure that they are socially compatible — to avoid fights. While female or desexed dogs can usually be safely housed together care should be taken if housing entire males with other entire males (due to conflict issues) or with entire females (to avoid unplanned pregnancies). Each dog needs to have its own sleeping area and food bowl.

If metal or concrete kennels or sleeping areas are used, bedding needs to be provided to minimise the risk of pressure sores and arthritis. Additionally, metal kennels should be placed in a shaded area or an alternative shelter provided for dogs in hot weather.

Dogs should be kept out of areas with swimming pools unless supervised as they may fall or jump into a pool and drown if they are unable to climb out or get caught in a pool cover. Tethering is regarded as a temporary method of restraint that is not suitable for long-term confinement. In preference, dogs should be confined in a secure yard or properly constructed dog pen.

Guidelines

Dogs that escape the yard and roam the streets are susceptible to being injured by cars or through attack by other dogs or may become lost and impounded. Roaming dogs can also cause injury to other animals or people, for which owners are legally liable.

Electronic collar confinement systems do not meet the requirements for confinement of dogs to property and should not be used.

13. Transport

Minimum standards

- Dogs must not be transported in the boot of a car.
- Dogs must not be left unattended in the car if there is a possibility of heat stress occurring or in situations of extreme cold.
- Dogs must be properly tethered or restrained when on the back of a moving vehicle or trailer, in a manner that prevents the dog falling, hanging off or being injured. The only exemption to this is a dog actively being used to move livestock.
- Dogs being transported in a cage or other appropriate container must be able to comfortably stand, turn around, lie down and act normally.
- When travelling, dogs must be provided with adequate ventilation. Containers must have multiple ventilation holes on at least three sides of the container.

Feedback

Recommended best practice

Dogs should be adequately restrained when travelling inside a vehicle for the safety of both the dog and human passengers. Unrestrained dogs can cause accidents and should never be allowed in the vicinity of the driver. In the case of an accident, an unrestrained dog may become a projectile and can damage itself and the occupants of the vehicle.

Dogs should not be allowed to travel with their head out of the car window. This is a road traffic legal requirement. Additionally particles of dirt can enter a dog's eyes, ears and nose, causing injury or infection.

If a dog must be left in a parked car at any time, lock all doors, park in a shady area and open the car windows wide enough to provide ventilation (without enabling the dog to jump out or get its head caught). Leave water available in a container that will not tip over. Be aware of weather conditions as the interior of a car can very rapidly become hot enough to cause heat stress or death in a dog even on mild days.

Carry dog food, water and a leash and stop regularly to allow the dogs some exercise and a toilet break. If being transported for more than short periods of time, dogs should be given regular opportunities to drink and exercise. Temperature and conditions should be taken into account when determining the frequency of provision of water. As a guide when the driver stops for a break, water should be offered to dogs being transported and dogs should also be given regular opportunity to urinate and defecate outside of the vehicle. Ensure dogs are kept on a leash during such breaks to avoid accidents or dogs going missing.

Guidelines

If a dog is not accustomed to car travel, take it for a few short rides before taking it on a long trip. If the dog is very anxious or suffers from motion sickness it may be medicated under veterinary advice.

When dogs are being transported by air the international air transport association regulations will apply.

14. Training, socialisation and exercise

Minimum standards

- Training methods used with dogs must be humane and not cause pain or suffering.
- Electronic dog collars must not be used except in accordance with the [Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations](#).
- Pronged collars must not be used.
- Dogs must not be attack trained except in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Operation of Dog Training Establishments.
- Dogs must be given regular exercise.
- Dogs must not be exercised in any way attached to a motor vehicle due to the danger of serious injury.
- Never leave young children and dogs together unsupervised by an adult.
- Dogs exercised from a bicycle must be healthy and fit and have been trained to be led from a bicycle.

Recommended best practice

Dog behaviour and safety is the responsibility of the owner. All dogs should be trained both for their own safety and that of people and other animals. Dogs need to be trained and regularly exercised (daily if possible).

Dogs should be gradually familiarised with any new experience, such as a harness for restraint in a car. When walking a dog outside a confined property, the owner or handler should be aware of potential dangers — such as vehicles or attacks from other dogs, from which the dog may need protection.

Familiarise a dog with different places and situations. Socialise a dog with other dogs and people, particularly during the formative 8 to 16 week period.

Teach family, friends and children how to interact with the family dog. This includes teaching children to leave dogs in peace when eating, sleeping or if sick or injured.

Dogs should have regular and frequent contact with their owner(s), other people and dogs outside of their yard as they are social animals and human contact is important. Without such contact dogs are likely to become dull, apathetic or develop destructive or aggressive behaviours.

Puppies should be socialised with a range of people and animals and exposed to a variety of experiences so they are confident with these situations later in life. Training and socialisation should be an ongoing commitment throughout the dog's life but are particularly important during the formative first 8 –16 week period of life.

Check or correction chains should only be used when training dogs. If left on the dog in the yard or enclosure they can get caught and the dog can be choked. Caution should be used when utilising check chains as improper use may cause neck or throat injuries. Advice on use of check and other training collars as well as training methods can be sought from animal behaviourists, approved dog trainers or veterinarians.

Examine dog collars daily for any sign of rubbing or injury. A collar needs to be tight enough that it cannot easily slip off but not so tight that it rubs or chokes the dog. Ideally you should be able to slip two fingers between the collar and dog's neck.

Dogs should be on a leash at all times in public areas unless in an off-leash area at which times they should be under effective control of the owner/carer.

Dogs should not be exercised if the weather is too hot, as they suffer easily from heat stress.

Dogs should not be exercised immediately before or after eating as it can cause problems such as bloat, particularly in deep-chested dogs.

Exercising of dogs from a bicycle is not generally recommended, as it can be dangerous for both the dog and the person on the bicycle. At any sign of fatigue in the dog, the person should stop the bicycle and walk with the dog. Similar care should be taken if exercising the

dog from roller-blades or other similar activities unless the dog is adequately trained for such exercise.

Dogs should be trained and socialised to prevent nuisance behaviours such as excessive barking. Behaviours such as nuisance barking are an offence under the [Domestic Animals Act 1994](#) [↗] and you may be prosecuted if the nuisance behaviour is not rectified.

Aggression in dogs should be discouraged. Dogs showing aggressive tendencies should be taken to an experienced dog behaviourist or trainer who can advise and train the owner on how to better manage such behaviour problems.

Guidelines

Care should be taken when introducing a new puppy or dog into a household with existing dogs or cats. Introduce the new animal slowly and under supervision to ensure any conflict over territory or hierarchy is controlled.

Old dogs and growing puppies should be exercised with care as they are more easily exhausted than other dogs. Overexercise in growing pups can cause joint problems particularly in large breed dogs.

It is an offence to train dogs to attack, except in accordance with the [Domestic Animals Act 1994](#) [↗]. Attack training is only permissible for police and armed services use. Licensed security guards may also have attack trained dogs provided the requirements of the Code of Practice for the Operation of Dog Training Establishments are met. Such dogs are automatically declared as dangerous dogs and owners must comply with the associated legislative requirements.

It is an offence under the [Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986](#) [↗] to use pronged collars on dogs.

Use of electronic collars is also illegal except for use on dogs that have been assessed as being suitable by a registered veterinary practitioner and the use of the collar is on the advice of a registered vet or qualified dog trainer (as defined by the Domestic Animals Act 1994). Refer to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations for further details on use of electronic collars. Such collars should be used as a last resort where other training methods have failed to correct the nuisance behaviour.

15. Injury and other potential welfare risks for dogs

Minimum standards

Injured or ill dogs must be promptly taken to a veterinarian or an animal shelter with a veterinary clinic for examination and treatment.

Recommended best practice

Most injuries to dogs can be prevented if they are kept confined to the owners property. Dogs wandering at large are in danger of injuries from being hit by a car or from fights with other dogs.

An injured dog should be handled carefully as it can react aggressively from fear and pain. For the dog's welfare it should be supported property, confined and a veterinarian consulted as soon as possible. An injured dog can be muzzled temporarily for safer handling, although care needs to be taken when using a muzzle. This is best done by an experienced person. **If the dog is unaccompanied by its owner and cannot be safely handled contact the local Council so the dog can be picked up and taken for treatment by experienced and trained dog handlers.**

Many dogs are fearful of fireworks and thunderstorms. Bring dogs inside during such times or, if this is not possible, make sure they are housed or confined securely so that they cannot escape or harm themselves. If a dog is affected by this problem contact a veterinarian for advice.

16. What if you are unable to keep your dog?

Minimum standards

It is an offence to dump or abandon dogs or puppies.

Recommended best practice

Circumstances may arise that mean owners are no longer able to keep a dog or puppies. In this situation either find an appropriate new home for them, take them to an animal shelter, surrender them to the local Council or have a veterinarian euthanase them.

Abandonment of dogs can lead to suffering for the animal as a result of starvation, disease or injury and is illegal.

17. Euthanasia

Minimum standards

- Euthanasia must be humane.
- Dogs or puppies must not be killed by being drowned, poisoned or gassed.

Recommended best practice

Euthanasia should be done by a registered veterinary practitioner or person who is appropriately trained in humane euthanasia. The recommended method of euthanasia is by lethal injection administered by a veterinarian however a gun shot at close range into the brain by a licensed and proficient person is also acceptable.

Gassing using car exhaust fumes is inhumane, because the exhaust fumes are hot and contain various irritant compounds.

Drowning and poisoning are not humane methods of euthanasia.

18. Further reading

- The Domestic Dog (1995) by James Serpell (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Everydog (1996) by Eric Allan and Rowan Blogg, Oxford University Press, Sydney.
- Doglopaedia. A Complete Guide to Dog Care (1997) by J.M. Evans and Kay White, Ringpress Books Ltd., Gloucestershire.

Brochures available from local Councils:

- Pet Registration
- Put your dog out back or it might put you in court
- Barking dogs
- The 10 commandments of responsible pet ownership
- Safety with Children
- Doggie Doo; do the right thing
- The time to desex is when you get your pet
- Microchip for life
- Things you should know about restricted breed dogs
- Things you should know about dangerous dogs
- Things you should know about guard dogs on non residential premises
- Things you should know about dog training establishments
- How to prevent dog attacks in the community
- How to prevent dog attacks in the home
- Things you should know about pet shops
- Things you should know about shelters and pounds
- Dogs, cats, neighbours and you (this brochure is produced by the Victorian Law Foundation)

Many of these brochures as well as other information is available on this website or by calling our customer service centre on 136 186.

Appendix 1: Organisations that can provide further information

| Organisation | Phone number |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Australian Veterinary Association or a local veterinarian [↗] | search online |
| Bureau of Animal Welfare | 136 186 |
| Local councils [↗] | Search for your local council [↗] |
| Local dog obedience clubs [↗] | search online |
| Lort Smith Animal Hospital [↗] | (03) 9328 3021 |
| The Lost Dogs' Home [↗] | (03) 9329 2755 |
| Petcare Information and Advisory Service [↗] | |
| RSPCA (Victoria) [↗] | (03) 9224 2222 |
| Victorian Animal Aid Trust [↗] | (03) 9725 5608 |
| Victorian Canine Association (Dogs Victoria) [↗] | (03) 9788 2500 |

Feedback 

Appendix 2: Indicators of dog health status

1. Signs of potential ill-health:

- increased appetite or water consumption
- loss of appetite or weight loss
- unusually dull or lethargic
- vomiting or diarrhoea
- straining to urinate or have a bowel motion
- runny or weepy nose or eyes
- lameness or difficulty standing or walking
- bleeding that has not stopped in a few minutes
- swelling of any body part
- apparent pain or discomfort
- restlessness or not sleeping
- sneezing or coughing repeatedly
- difficulty breathing or panting excessively
- patchy or excessive hair loss

- scratching at or shaking the head repeatedly
- wounds or inflamed areas
- loss of balance
- fits or seizures
- any other physical or behavioural abnormality.

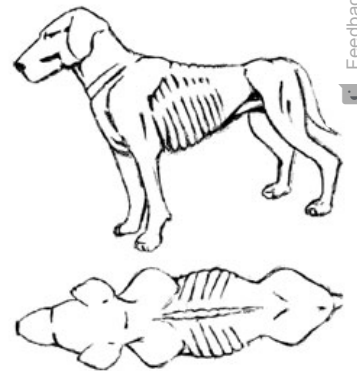
2. Signs of good health:

- bright, alert and responsive
- clean, shiny coat free of bare patches
- free of wounds, swelling or lumps
- free of fleas and intestinal worms
- healthy appetite and normal weight
- keen to exercise
- moves freely and easily when walking or running
- have a bowel motion at least once a day but not have diarrhoea
- urinates at regular intervals through the day
- free of abnormal discharges from eyes, nose, mouth or ears
- not coughing or sneezing excessively
- free from abnormal odours.

Appendix 3: Body condition chart — dogs

Emaciated

- Individual ribs, spine and pelvis prominent and evident from a distance
- Lack of muscle mass
- Little or no body fat
- Rump hollow
- Waist prominent when viewed from above
- Abdomen obviously tucked up
- Neck thin
- No fat on tail.

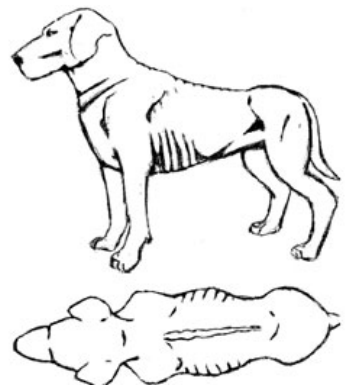


Feedback

Veterinary advice must be sought.

Thin

- Ribs, spine and pelvis bones visible and easily felt
- Little body fat
- Neck thin
- Abdomen tucked up
- Little fat on tail
- Obvious waist when viewed from above.



Increase feeding and worm dog if not wormed recently (ensure allwormer used – some products do not cover all worms).

Seek veterinary advice if dog remains underweight or unsure of feeding or worming regime.

Ideal

- Ribs and spine can be felt, last few ribs may be visible
- Dog should have a waist when viewed from above
- Belly is tucked up when viewed from side
- Good muscle mass

- Rump well muscled.

Overweight

- Ribs and spine not visible but can be felt
- Fat deposit on tail
- Little or no waist when viewed from above, rounded appearance, back appears broadened
- Dog squarish along back line when viewed from side
- Abdomen not tucked up, may appear rounded underneath.

Reduce feed intake or provide lower calorie feed.

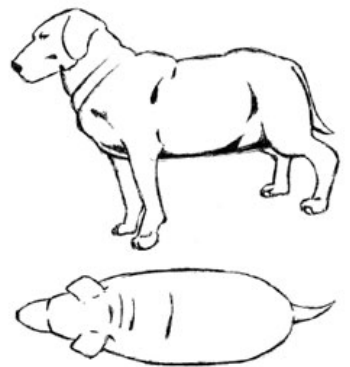
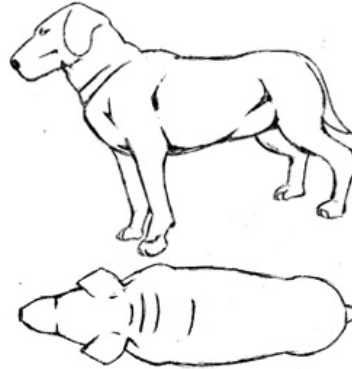
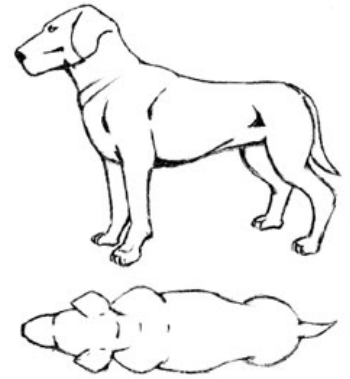
Increase exercise.

Seek veterinary advice if unsure of appropriate diet or concerns over exercise regime.

Obese

- Ribs and spine not visible and difficult to feel
- Tail has obvious fat deposit
- No waist and back broadened when viewed from above
- Belly obviously rounded and possibly distended
- Dog square or rounded up along back line when viewed from side.

Seek veterinary advice on diet and exercise regime.



Feedback

Appendix 4: Minimum enclosure sizes for housing per adult dog

| Height of dog | Min area (Sq. m) | Min width (cm) | Min height (cm) |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 70cm and above | 15 | 240 | 180 |
| 40–70cm | 10 | 180 | 180 |
| less than 40cm | 7 | 120 | 180 |

Was this page helpful?

 YES

 NO

Page last updated: 22 Jul 2021

 Feedback