

Transporting Cats

Our topics for this week are:

- Travel regulations
- Car travel
- Air travel

TRAVEL REGULATIONS

Regulations on interstate, international, and air travel change frequently and must be rechecked each time a cat is transported. To travel to the U.S., cats must be more than three months old, vaccinated for rabies, and free of signs of infectious diseases. For interstate travel, proof of current rabies vaccination and a current health certificate should accompany the cat. Travel to Hawaii and Guam, which are rabies-free islands, has more restrictions.

International travel should be investigated at least 120 days in advance. Current requirements can be obtained from the destination's embassy or consulate. A list of foreign embassies and consulates in the U.S. is available from the U.S. Department of State:

<http://usembassy.state.gov/>

Regardless of the means of travel, there is risk of a medical emergency or escape. A chest harness or collar should be worn with an ID tag that includes the owner's name, address, and cell phone number. A land-phone number, while traveling, is much less useful. Cats that travel should have an identification microchip embedded in case of the cat's escape. A chest harness is more secure and prevents escapes better than a collar. A travel tag should also be attached to the harness or collar that provides the destination and destination contact information.

TRAVEL BY CAR

If transporting a cat by car or in truck cabs, cats should ride in a back seat and be restrained in a crate that is strapped to floor anchors. This protects cats from airbag injuries and the driver from interference with driving (vision obstruction, interference with braking) or being injured by a cat becoming a missile in an accident. More information on travel restraints is available at the Center for Pet Safety: <http://www.centerforpetsafety.org/> Cats should be desensitized to car travel by experiencing frequent short trips by car to a pleasurable destination with no adverse events during their primary socialization period (two to seven weeks of age), or as soon after that as possible.

If cats will be transported in a carrier, pre-trip training should include free access in and out of the carrier, being fed in the carrier, and sleeping in the carrier to develop of feeling of security while in the carrier.

If the temperature is over 72°F, cats should not be left in cars. At 72°F, the inside of a car can reach 100°F in 30 minutes. Temperatures below 55°F may be too low for some cats. Pictures should be carried in case of the need to search for an escaped cat. Food, water, and any

needed medications should also be available during the trip.

Interstate travel must meet federal requirements. These include a certificate of veterinary inspection, provision of adequate shelter from all elements and protection from injury, sufficient cleanliness to avoid contact with urine and feces, protection against hazardous temperature extremes, uncontaminated and nutritious food at least once per day, and a program of parasite control.

AIR TRAVEL

Preparing for Air Travel

Travel on an airline should be arranged well in advance of the intended travel date. The number of animals per flight are limited. In temperate weather, it is best to choose early morning nonstop flights whenever possible. In hot weather, early or late flights are preferable; in colder weather, get midday flights are best. Travel during holiday periods should be avoided.

Prior to making travel arrangements a veterinary exam for age and health related restrictions should be performed. Most carriers require a certificate of veterinary inspection (health certificate) signed in the last 10 days. Some airlines require an acclimation certificate from a veterinarian. Acclimation certificates waive the airline's requirement that they prevent exposure to less than 45°F for more than 45 minutes during ground transfer or for more than four hours if in a holding facility. An acclimation certificate does not, however, waive airline requirement that the cat cannot be exposed to more than 85°F for more than 45 minutes on the ground or four hours in a holding facility.

Only light feeding and access to water should be provided about three hours prior to departure. Tranquilizers are not recommended due to impaired ability to maintain normal body temperature and to keep balance during travel. Tranquilizers can also exacerbate heart or respiratory problems.

Travel Crates

Travel crates for air travel should be big enough to allow the cat to stand and turn around. There should be no interior protrusions that could injure the cat. The crate should have handles or grips and a leak proof bottom with absorbent bedding. Both sides should be ventilated. Labels should be attached that provide the owner's name, home address, phone number, destination contact information and sign that it is "Live Animal" and arrows for which is upright. Containers for food and water need to be accessible from outside and secured inside. If a collar is worn by the cat, it should be a break-away collar to prevent the risk of strangulation. Carriers for travel in passenger section should be soft-sided. Rigid clamshell crates are needed for travel in cargo holds.

Now, let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- Chest harnesses for cats provide more security from escape during travel
- Prior to travel, a cat should be taken on short low-stress trips in a car and given frequent treats to desensitize it to travel
- Tranquilizers are NOT routinely recommended for cats to travel

More information on animal handling is available in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint* published by CRC Press. It is also available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Don't forget serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.