

## short/snub-nosed dogs and air travel

This document **IS**:

- Important information and insight for you about the very real increased risks which exist when relocating by air any short/snub-nosed breed of dog (and to some extent, cat).
- An alert to you that you should ensure your short-nosed pet is in good health before travelling so that all risks are minimised as much as possible.
- Our very best effort to help you make a good decision, one way or the other, about whether or not you should relocate your short-nosed pet.

This document is **NOT**:

- An attempt to put you off relocating your short-nosed dog (or cat).
- An attempt on our part to wholly indemnify DKC with regard to our acknowledged and accepted responsibilities to you and your pet when managing your relocation, in those aspects of the relocation over which we have control.
- Scaremongering.

Hundreds of thousands of domestic pets and other animals are relocated by air every single year and the vast majority travel safely, well and happily. Nevertheless, there are risks and there certainly are, on a few occasions, injuries and even fatalities. It is not a nice subject to raise and to have to discuss, but indeed it is an important subject to discuss and it is very important that we make sure you are aware of the realities because when relocating snub-nosed breeds, these realities take on a heightened relevance and importance - especially during very hot times of the year.

Just below you will see that we ask for your signature. We wish to be clear: we are not trying to scare you off or deny our responsibility to take proper care in helping you. Signing this document is nothing more than you acknowledging that you have read this document and have given this important subject due consideration. If you decide that you still wish to relocate your short-nosed pet, we will happily help you do that, as we do for thousands of other customers each year, many of whom also have short-nosed pets. We simply want to make sure you are aware of as much as possible so that together, you and we, can make the best possible decisions as we go along.

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By signing this document, you acknowledge that you have read this and the following 4 pages of this document, have talked things through with your veterinarian and your [DKC Relocations](#) Account Manager, and feel informed about the subject of relocating by air your short/snub-nosed dog or cat.

Customer Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Customer Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



This and the next pages consist of two parts: a DKC summary of key points to be aware of when relocating your snub-nosed pet by air, and on the following pages a document from the American Veterinary Medical Association on the same subject (which is freely available on the internet). Note that there is some repetition of the contents of these two parts... but a little repetition never hurt anyone, right?

- Snub/short-nosed dog breeds (the correct/technical term is *brachycephalic* dog breeds) include English and French bulldogs, Pugs, Boston Terriers, Pekingeses, Lhaso Apsos, Shih Tzus, Mastiffs and Boxers, Boston Terriers, Brussel Griffins, English Toy Spaniels, Japanese Spaniels, Pekinese and Tibetan Spaniels. Cats of this kind include exotics, Himalayans, Persians and Chinchillas. (Note that for the most part we will refer herein to "dogs" for ease of communication and because the greatest concerns indeed lie with dogs; however, all the information is relevant in some degree or other to cats as well.)
- These dogs are statistically more prone to death during air travel than are dog breeds with normal snouts. In fact, 50% of all deaths in dogs during air travel in the past five years were of dogs belonging to this short-nosed group.
- Nevertheless, it is important to remember that airline deaths are not common and that hundreds of thousands of pets fly safely around the world every year. In other words, although it is true that the potential of a problem developing with a short-nosed breed while in transit is indeed higher than with other breeds, the majority of these animals do travel and travel safely.
- The anatomy of snub-nosed breeds is at the root of the potential problem while travelling. These breeds have less internal anatomical space in which to pack the same amount of obviously-important anatomical respiratory structures when compared to normal-nosed breeds. Even when not travelling, not overheated and not stressed, their anatomical nature creates a rather tight fit inside them, resulting in narrowing of airways which then causes a relative restriction to airflow. Technically speaking, these breeds suffer from what is known as "brachycephalic airways syndrome" and this can vary in severity depending on the individual animal. Some bulldogs, for example, may only snore when they sleep while others may be literally unable to cope with any heat or exercise and will ultimately need surgery just to help correct some of these genetic defects causing them problems during normal life and activity. Imagine the potential additional difficulties for these breeds when they are excited, stressed, hot and/or in confined spaces. It is important to understand and remember that dogs regulate their body temperature by panting, so the overall functionality of their airways is key to this process.
- Many short-nosed dogs also have smaller windpipes (i.e. tracheas) and these can collapse under pressure when a dog is trying hard to take in air as it overheats or exerts itself - a bit like a straw collapsing when it is sucked on too hard. This, coupled with the tight space in their nose and pharynx, can cause major issues with breathing and thermoregulation. Obesity compounds these problems even further. And always a concern, overheating is even more of a concern for these dogs, especially those with coats of darker hair because, as with all other things which are dark, they attract the heat.
- In the most severe cases, *upper airway surgery* is a technique used to try and help these dogs. Surgery involves usually all, or some, of the following corrective procedures: a) Opening up small or stenotic nostrils; b) Removing everted laryngeal ventricles (small soft tissue structures that take up space in the larynx), and; c) Shortening the soft palate if it is elongated and therefore taking up airway space. Surgery is certainly not necessary for every snub-nosed dog, but there are many that struggle to breathe normally even under the best of circumstances and would therefore benefit from these procedures. Your veterinarian would certainly be able to advise you about this, though it is not something we suggest for the purpose of air travel only. And we want to highlight that if your snub-nosed dog is medically considered as needing surgical intervention to help breathing, then this raises a warning flag that your dog will be at higher risk during flight.
- Short-nosed dog breeds are also not as efficient at thermoregulation as normally-snouted breeds are, for all the previously stated reasons - and they appear to be quite sensitive to changes in air-quality and temperature. Although the cargo hold of aircraft is pressure- and temperature-controlled, fluctuations can and do occur. And of course while in flight there are no personnel in the cargo hold, so if issues do arise with your pet, such as him struggling to thermoregulate, these issues will not be noticed and no one will be able to do anything about it.
- Furthermore, because your pet will be inside a travel crate, there could be additional ventilation/airflow constraints, the likes of which have little-to-no impact on a pet without anatomical issues but which could be the cause of serious issues for snub-nosed breeds. Indeed, for this reason the airlines require, and DKC always ensure, that snub-nosed breeds travel in crates which are one size larger than normally required for a dog or cat of a particular size, and which have more-than-normal ventilation holes - all to maximise air circulation and general ventilation.
- There are steps that can be taken to reduce anxiety and stress in your pet, and to therefore reduce the risk of airway and temperature-related issues for your short-nosed pet. These are: a) Familiarise your dog with his travel box well in advance of flying; b) Make sure the correct size and type of travel box is used; c) Place an article of your clothing in the travel box with your dog as this may help him feel more comfortable and, therefore, calm; d) Avoid sedating your dog - this is strongly advised against as it can lead to blood pressure and thermoregulation changes; e) Choose to travel at cooler times of the year and or time of day wherever possible; f) Have your snub-nosed pet *thoroughly* checked by your vet prior to travel so that risk factors can be identified as well as possible and, hopefully, dealt with. If your pet is leaving the UAE and you'd like some medical advice, we can arrange a check-up with our vets at DKC Veterinary Clinic.



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## *Frequently Asked Questions by Pet Owners about*

# **Short-Nosed Dogs and Air Travel**

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In July 2010, the U.S. Department of Transportation released statistics that showed short-nosed breeds of dogs—such as pugs, Boston Terriers, boxers, mastiffs, Pekingese, Lhasa Apsos, Shih tzus and bulldogs—are more likely to die on airplanes than dogs with normal-length muzzles. In fact, over the last 5 years, approximately one-half of the 122 dog deaths associated with airline flights involved these short-faced breeds. 25 of the 122 dogs that died over the 5-year period were English bulldogs, followed by 11 pugs, the only other breed in double digits. Although these numbers seem a bit scary, keep in mind that this is a very small number when compared to the hundreds of thousands of animals that fly every year.

### **Q. Why are these dog breeds more prone to respiratory problems?**

**A:** Veterinarians have long known that short-nosed – the technical term is brachycephalic – dog breeds are more prone to respiratory problems under normal circumstances, and not just during air travel. You see, brachycephalic breeds are prone to respiratory problems because, although they have shortened noses, they still have to pack all of the same anatomical structures in there that dogs with longer snouts do. Just because their snouts are shorter doesn't mean they're missing any parts – they still have to pack nasal passages, sinuses, and a hard palate into that small area. It's sort of like moving from a house to an apartment and having to put the same amount of furniture in the apartment – it's all there, but it can be a bit cramped. The situation is worsened if the dog is overweight or obese.

### **Q: What kinds of respiratory problems can these dog breeds have?**

**A:** As a result of the tighter space, they are prone to problems such as smaller-than-normal nostrils, a longer-than-normal soft palate, and a narrowed trachea (or windpipe). Because of these abnormalities, they don't breathe as efficiently as dogs with normal-length snouts and can have difficulty cooling off when they're playing or exercising, or if they're stressed or overheated. And when they're stressed, their airway can actually collapse (either partially or completely) and cut off their airflow. It's like breathing through a straw – if you gently suck through the straw, there's no problem getting air. But when you really try to suck hard through the straw, similar to what these dogs may do when they're stressed, exercising or overheating, the straw collapses and you don't get air. This doesn't always cause death, but it can cut off their oxygen supply temporarily and cause the dogs to collapse or overheat.

### **Q. How do these problems put these dog breeds at higher risk during flights?**

**A:** Because of their anatomical abnormalities, short-nosed breeds seem to be more vulnerable to changes in air quality and temperature in the cargo hold of a plane. Although pets are transported in pressurized cargo holds and get much the same air that the passengers in the cabin do, the air circulation might not be ideal for your pet's individual needs (and remember, your dog is in a crate that could also be affecting ventilation). In addition, remember that there isn't anyone in that hold area that can

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monitor your pet and provide help if needed – so if there’s a problem, you won’t know until the plane has landed and your pet has been unloaded.

**Q: So, what’s a pet owner to do? Should I never fly with a short-nosed pet?**

**A:** We’re not saying you should completely avoid air travel with your pet, even with a short-nosed pet. Knowing there are risks is half the battle, and with proper precautions, you can minimize the risks. If you know you’re going to be traveling with your pet on an airplane, it really helps to prepare ahead of time.

**Q. What can I do to reduce the risks of airline travel for my short-nosed pet?**

**A:** There are many things you can do, including:

- Keep your pet healthy and at a normal weight. Pets with underlying medical conditions may be more likely to have problems during transport. Elderly and obese pets may also be at higher risk.
- Getting your pet used to its traveling crate can really reduce stress while traveling. Think about it...when you’re on a plane, you understand what’s going on while taking off and landing or even when there’s turbulence, but your pet doesn’t know what’s happening, and this can be stressful – and this can add to the stress your pet may already have if it’s in a travel carrier for the first time. If your pet is used to the travel crate, it’s more likely to be comfortable in the crate and travel with less stress. And remember, ALL travel crates, regardless of the breed of dog being transported, need to be secure so your pet can’t escape.
- Although it can be comforting to your pet to have a familiar-smelling item in its travel crate, avoid thick blankets, fluffy towels or cloth items that your pet can wrap itself or bury its nose in – this could increase the risk of respiratory problems. A very thin blanket or flat newspaper is best for lining the crate.
- If your dog is small enough to fit in a pet carrier that fits under the airline seat, and many popular brachycephalic breeds are, you can ask the airline to allow you to bring your pet into the passenger area of the plane with you. Do this when you make your reservation, not when you show up at the airport for your flight. Some airlines will allow this, but you should always ask about the airline’s policy about pets in the passenger cabin.
  - The airline may charge an additional fee for pets in the cabin, and many airlines place limits on the number of pets allowed in the cabin.
  - In addition, airlines may have specific restrictions on the size of carriers allowed in the cabin as well as in the hold.
  - Some airlines may not allow certain breeds of dogs to be transported in the cargo holds of their planes, and airlines such as Continental Airlines also have embargo policies based on the size of the aircraft and the environmental conditions. For example, an airline may refuse to allow short-nosed dogs to be transported in the hold during certain times of the year (due to environmental temperatures) or on certain flights (based on the size of the plane). Most of the embargos apply to animals transported in the hold, and do not apply to pets in the cabin.
- Pick your flight times carefully. When you and your pet are in the air, the pressure and temperature in the plane is controlled. However, you’ve probably noticed that the air seems a little stale and the temperature isn’t as well regulated when you’re sitting on the tarmac – that’s because the plane’s temperature and air pressure controls are often turned down until you’re in the air. What does this mean? Well, it means that if you’re on the tarmac for a long period of time, the temperature in the cargo hold may rise above (if it’s hot) or fall below (if it’s cold) the

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ideal temperatures for your pet. To protect pet passengers, airlines have their own temperature restrictions—for example, no pets in the cargo bay when the forecast is 85 degrees (F) or higher—but you can be even more careful.

- Try to minimize layovers where your pet might be kept in the cargo hold or sitting on the tarmac in temperatures that aren't comfortable for it. For example, in warmer months, or when you're traveling to a warm destination, only fly earlier or later in the day to avoid the mid-day high temperatures so the cargo area doesn't get uncomfortably hot. During cold weather, or when flying to a colder destination, try to fly during the warmer parts of the day.
- Visit your veterinarian within 10 days before any interstate trip you take with your pet, but particularly before airplane trips. Pet owners are required by law to get a certificate of veterinary inspection (often called a health certificate) from their veterinarian for any trip that crosses state lines, and the airlines often require a copy of the health certificate before they'll let your pet fly. If you have a short-nosed breed of dog, ask your veterinarian about your pet's respiratory health and what precautions you can take to minimize the risks for your pet.
- Your veterinarian can help you figure out what kind and size travel carrier you should get and how best to mark it with your personal information to make sure you and your pet are reunited after the flight, what kind of animal identification is appropriate (such as tags, microchip, etc.), and when you should feed your pet during travel.
- We strongly recommend that you avoid tranquilizing your pet for air travel, because it can increase your pet's risk of injury and health problems.

#### **Q. What about short-nosed cat breeds? Are they also at risk?**

**A:** Because they tend to be smaller, most cats travel in carriers in the passenger cabin with their owners, so there are less reported deaths in cats. However, there are short-faced cat breeds, and they may also be prone to more respiratory problems than cats with normal-length faces – so be cautious if your short-faced cat needs to travel in the cargo hold.

***As always, talk to your veterinarian if you have ANY concerns about your pet's health.***

#### ***Additional resources:***

##### **AVMA**

[Frequently Asked Questions about Traveling with Your Pet](#)

[Traveling with Your Pet](#) (brochure)

##### **U.S. Department of Transportation**

["Short-Faced" Dogs More Prone to Death in Flight, According to DOT Data](#) (Press release, July 16, 2010)

[Deceased canines in transit, May 2005-2010](#) (data tables)

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