

Leaving a dog with a boarding facility can feel like delegating part of your family to a stranger. Done well, it is the simplest way to keep a dog safe, exercised, and mentally engaged while you travel or manage a long work assignment. Done poorly, it creates stress for the dog and for you, and may result in unexpected costs or behavior problems. This guide covers the practical schedule decisions, how to choose a facility, how pricing works, what to pack, and specific strategies for holiday boarding and long term boarding so you can plan a stay that keeps your dog comfortable and your plans on track.

**Why a schedule matters** A clear schedule reduces chaos. Dogs thrive on predictability, and facilities that operate on a consistent daily rhythm — feeding, exercise, rest, interaction — cut stress for animals and staff alike. For owners, a schedule removes guesswork about drop-off and pick-up times, vaccination cutoffs, or last-minute boarding surcharges. Practically, a predictable schedule also gives you benchmarks: when the facility will walk your dog, when they feed, whether there is an evening settling routine. Those elements matter more than aesthetic amenities when you want your dog to return calm and happy.

**Picking the right facility** Facility selection can feel overwhelming because every kennel, in-home sitter, and luxury resort claims to be the best fit. Start with the basics: cleanliness, staff-to-dog ratio, emergency protocols, and how they handle separation or medical needs. Visit in person. Look for staff who greet dogs by name, clean smelling spaces, secure fencing, and visible ways they separate dogs by size and temperament. Ask to see the outdoor run area during peak use times, and observe whether high-energy dogs are appropriately supervised.

**Licensing and insurance** are non-negotiable. Confirm the business holds any required municipal or state kennel permits and that they carry commercial liability insurance. If your dog has medical issues, find a facility with staff confident in administering medications and a protocol for veterinary emergency transport. If the facility uses webcams, note whether they are live-streamed to owners and whether staff monitor them; cameras can help but are not a substitute for trained personnel.

**Holiday boarding:** plan earlier than you think Peak travel windows — late December to early January, spring break weeks, and major summer holidays — fill up fast. For holiday boarding, reserve a spot as soon as your travel dates are set. In practical terms, that often means booking 4 to 8 weeks ahead for popular, well-reviewed facilities, and up to 12 weeks ahead for boutique or small in-home boarders that take only a handful of dogs. During holidays facilities often require a nonrefundable deposit and may enforce a minimum-stay policy, such as three or five nights.

**Expect schedule adjustments during holidays.** Staff shortages and higher occupancy may reduce one-on-one playtime and replace weekday routines with larger group activities. If consistent owner-style care matters to your dog, ask whether the facility caps group sizes or offers a private-suite option. Some facilities raise prices during holidays; others add fees for last-minute bookings. Factor those possibilities into your budget.

**Long term boarding: different considerations** Long term boarding, such as stays longer than four weeks, requires a different mindset from a short vacation absence. Dogs boarded long term need mental variety, structure, and observation for signs of institutional boredom like pacing or over-grooming. Ask whether the facility includes periodic behavior assessments and whether they adjust exercise and enrichment plans over time. If your dog has separation anxiety, repeatedly changing caregiving staff can worsen that anxiety. For long stays, prioritize facilities that can offer a predictable primary caregiver or daily notes from the same handler.

**Long term rates** are often negotiable. Some facilities offer lower per-night pricing after a threshold — for example, a reduced rate after the first 14 nights. If you plan a long stay, negotiate for a weekly or monthly discounted rate and confirm what services the discount covers. Clarify whether grooming, medication administration, and special dietary needs are included or billed separately. When your dog is away for months,

schedule video check-ins, and request written progress notes every 7 to 10 days so you can monitor well-being and behavior.

**Understanding boarding pricing** Boarding pricing varies widely by region and facility type. Typical ranges in many parts of the U.S. are roughly \$25 to \$100 per night for standard kennel boarding, \$40 to \$80 per night for day-care-style facilities that include multiple play sessions, and \$60 to \$200 per night for luxury suites with webcams and individual attention. Veterinary boarding or specialized medical care will be significantly higher and is often billed daily plus supplies and medication administration.

**What impacts cost:** staff-to-dog ratio, facility amenities, supervised playtime, grooming, and the need for medical attention. Holiday periods and short-notice bookings can add a premium of 10 to 50 percent depending on demand. Ask for a line-itemed quote in writing so you can compare: base nightly rate, taxes, mandatory fees (cleaning, administration), optional services (extra walks, training sessions, individual time), and medical or medication costs. Facilities that require a deposit should state refund policies clearly. For long term boarding, ask whether a weekly cleaning surcharge applies.

**Vaccinations, paperwork, and timing** Most reputable facilities require proof of core vaccinations: rabies, distemper/parvovirus (DHPP), and, depending on activities, bordetella. Some require a negative fecal test within the last 6 months or an annual fecal check. If your dog needs to start a vaccine series, complete it at least two weeks before boarding to allow immunity development and for paperwork to be processed.

**Legal and emergency paperwork** belongs in both hardcopy and digital formats. Bring a signed authorization for emergency veterinary care, the local veterinarian's contact, your emergency contact person who can make decisions, and a list of medications with dosages and administration times. If your dog has behavior triggers or health conditions, provide a written action plan the staff can follow.

**Boarding packing guide** A thoughtful packing approach makes the dog's transition smoother and prevents lost items. Pack familiar items that carry your scent, a measured amount of food with feeding instructions, any medications labeled with clear dosing instructions, and a secure collar with ID tags. Avoid packing items of high sentimental value or anything that could be chewed and present a choking hazard. Include a few washcloths or old t-shirts with your scent; many dogs find them calming.

**Packing checklist (five essential items)**

1. Food measured into daily portions and stored in labeled, airtight bags or containers with feeding schedule.
2. Medications in original containers, with written dosing times and administration instructions.
3. Collar and ID tags, plus a backup flat collar; leave harnesses if the facility asks for collar-only during rest.
4. Two familiar bedding items or shirts that can be laundered if soiled.
5. Emergency contact and signed veterinary authorization form, plus your dog's vaccination records.

**Scheduling drop-off and pick-up** Coordinate drop-off and pick-up times to match both your schedule and the facility's daily rhythm. Most facilities have fixed windows, often morning drop-off hours between 7:30 and 10:00 and afternoon pick-up between 4:00 and 6:00, but hours vary. Arriving [Hip Hounds hiphounds.com](http://hiphounds.com) early on drop-off day can let staff do a longer meet-and-greet and allow your dog to decompress before your departure. If you must leave during a facility's off hours, confirm whether the facility offers extended-hours service and what the fee is.

A small anecdote: one client arrived five minutes before closing and expected a speedy handoff. The staff had already completed the evening feeding rotation, so the dog missed his usual settling walk. He paced that night and took three days to return to baseline. The lesson — a 30-minute window can change a dog's first impression of a facility.

## Drop-off and pick-up timeline (practical timeline to follow)

1. One month before travel: reserve boarding and confirm vaccination requirements and deposit details.
2. Two weeks before travel: prepare and portion food, finalize medication instructions, and attach ID tags.
3. Drop-off day: arrive during the facility's requested window, bring paperwork, do a calm 10-minute good-bye, and leave promptly.
4. During the stay: request video check-ins or daily notes if available; for stays longer than two weeks, schedule weekly updates.
5. Pick-up day: plan a short walk after pickup if the facility allows, so your dog can relieve and decompress before a car ride.

**Managing separation stress and behavior** Some dogs adjust to boarding naturally, others show signs of stress like decreased appetite, whining, or increased shedding. Proactive measures help. Do multiple short trial stays before a long or holiday boarding — an overnight followed by a two-night stay gives staff time to assess your dog and for your dog to learn the routine. Bring familiar toys but avoid ones that encourage resource guarding.

If your dog is medication-sensitive, consider behavioral tools such as gradual desensitization to crates or practice leaving them alone for short intervals before the board. For severe separation anxiety, consult with a behaviorist prior to boarding; sometimes a prescription anti-anxiety medication taken short term makes a night or two manageable when combined with calming pheromones and a clear routine.

**Communication expectations** Define communication up front. Some facilities send daily summaries; others provide updates only on request. If you expect video updates, ensure you understand privacy and whether the cameras cover common areas only. Ask which staff member will be your point of contact and how they handle health emergencies. Agree on a spending cap for emergency veterinary care to avoid surprise decisions.

**Special cases: puppies, seniors, and medical needs** Puppies need a different schedule: more frequent bathroom breaks, supervised play, and shorter rest cycles. Many facilities will accept puppies only after completing a vaccine series appropriate to age. For puppies under 16 weeks, ask whether the facility mandates shorter stays or offers a puppy-friendly program with socialization sessions.

Senior dogs often thrive under staff observation when mobility or cognitive function is declining. Choose a facility comfortable with slow gait, medication administration, and regular monitoring. For dogs with chronic conditions, verify whether staff can administer injections and whether they can handle special diets and therapeutic grooming.

Medical boarding, such as post-operative stays or ongoing treatments, should take place at a facility staffed by veterinary technicians or at a veterinary hospital. Expect higher nightly rates and a stricter admissions process, including direct communication with your veterinarian.

**Trade-offs and decision points** Choosing between an in-home sitter and a boarding facility is a trade-off. An in-home sitter keeps the dog in familiar surroundings and prevents disruptions to other pets, but it may lack the same level of supervision if the sitter is alone for long stretches. A boarding facility provides socialization opportunities, regular staff presence, and immediate access to a veterinarian in many cases, but it can be stressful for dogs that do not adapt to new environments.

Budget constraints force choices between bundled packages and pay-as-you-go services. A mid-priced facility that includes two daily walks and monitoring can cost less overall than a cheaper kennel plus paid add-on walks. For long term boarding, calculate the true cost including transportation, any weekly cleaning surcharges, grooming, and potential training sessions needed to reset behaviors after a long stay.

Final planning checklist in prose Confirm reservations and deposits at least one month before travel, or earlier for holiday windows. Schedule vaccinations and any fecal testing at least two weeks before boarding. Prepare food portions and label medications, packing them in their original containers with clear instructions. Visit the facility at an active hour to observe staff interactions and outdoor play areas. Arrange for a primary contact at the facility and agree on emergency spending limits and communication frequency. Finally, plan a short trial stay if your dog has never boarded or if the upcoming stay is longer than a week.

A practical closing note Think of boarding as a temporary caregiving handoff that you can make predictable. A clear schedule, careful packing, the right facility, and a few trial runs with your dog turn a potentially anxious experience into a routine that your pet can anticipate. When you return, look for signs that the environment supported your dog — steady appetite, normal energy, and a relaxed greeting. Those signals tell you the schedule worked. If problems arise, use the experience to adjust future bookings, change the facility, or add training work ahead of the next stay. With planning, most dogs do fine and owners come back with a relaxed, contented companion.

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