

### Responsible animal / pet ownership

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#### **This guidance is for England**

If you are the owner of an animal you must comply with the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

This Act places a duty on anyone that owns or is responsible for an animal (even on a temporary basis) to ensure that the welfare needs of the animal are met and no animal suffers unnecessarily.

The legislation applies to pets (mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish) and farmed livestock such as cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, poultry and horses.

In order to ensure that the needs of the animal can be met the responsible person should, before obtaining an animal, have an adequate knowledge of what the animal's needs are and how these needs can be met. This varies greatly from species to species. The person responsible for an animal should have some practical experience (such as handling and feeding) as well as theoretical knowledge (such as possible illnesses and how to reduce the risks) of how to care for the animal.

#### **A suitable environment**

Animals must be given suitable accommodation that provides:

- adequate shelter
- a comfortable resting area
- adequate lighting
- adequate ventilation
- an adequate space to exercise

- a temperature-controlled environment (if appropriate)
- a safe and secure place

All reasonable steps must also be taken to ensure nothing is present in the environment that can cause injury or be detrimental to the animal's health, such as sharp objects or poisonous plants.

## **A suitable diet**

Animals must be provided with an adequate and suitable diet, including:

- access to fresh water (unless a vet directs otherwise)
- a balanced diet that meets all the animal's nutritional needs, which vary at different stages of life. The amount of food given must be appropriate for the animal to maintain its correct body condition (not too thin or too fat)

All food must be wholesome and not injurious to the animal's health.

## **Ability to exhibit normal behaviour**

All animals must be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns. Behaviour patterns vary depending on the species of animal. The ability to play and interact is particularly important for many young animals (such as dogs, horses and pigs) as it allows them to learn how to socialise, communicate and interact with other animals and people properly. Being able to express normal behaviour also helps to prevent animals becoming bored, stressed and frustrated.

It is important that anyone responsible for animals is able to recognise the early signs of stress and is able to take appropriate remedial action.

## **Housed with, or apart from, other animals**

Social interaction is very important for many animals but it is also important that each individual animal can escape to a safe area and not be subjected to bullying from others. Some animals prefer to live alone.

Where many animals are fed together, sufficient feeding space must be provided to ensure all animals can get a fair share of the food.

## **Protected from pain, injury, suffering and disease**

All animals must be regularly checked for signs of suffering, injury and disease. Where any welfare problems are found, prompt action must be taken, including seeking veterinary advice where appropriate.

## **Pet travel**

In the UK there is a pet travel scheme that allows dogs, cats and ferrets to enter the UK and also allows owners to take these animals out of the UK (on holiday etc) as long as certain rules are met.

Pet dogs (including guide and hearing), cats and ferrets are allowed to enter (or re-enter) the UK without having to put them in quarantine. This is dependent on two things:

- meeting the provisions of the scheme (see link below)
- the country or territory the pets are coming from

If you are thinking of bringing a pet dog, cat or ferret into the UK then you must follow the rules in place, otherwise your pet may be denied entry and removed from the country or placed into licensed quarantine, for which you will be charged.

For other species of pet animals (rodents, rabbits, birds, ornamental fish, invertebrates, amphibians and reptiles) there are not the same entry requirements.

However, due to rabies control legislation, pet rabbits and rodents brought in from non-EU countries must be placed in licensed quarantine and need an import licence.

Further information on bringing animals into the UK can be found on the GOV.UK website.

## **What else should I consider?**

Buying and caring for animals can be very expensive. If you are considering buying an animal, research your chosen pet to gain an idea about how much feed, accommodation, vaccinations, veterinary visits, etc will cost. This will help you to decide whether keeping a pet is an affordable option. Other things to consider include:

- do you have enough time to spend with your pet to adequately care for it and provide for all its welfare needs?
- is there somewhere suitable to store feed and keep it cool and dry, and free from pests and vermin?
- do you have adequate funds to cover any unexpected costs such as veterinary fees?
- is insurance required for public liability or veterinary costs?
- what contingency plans do you have if the animal is ill and needs to be isolated?
- who will look after the animals when you are ill or on holiday?
- are the animals likely to annoy your neighbours - for example, cockerels crowing, pigs turning land into a mud bath, odour from pens or muck heaps?
- is any paperwork required for the animals - for example, passports for cattle and horses, or movement documents for sheep, goats and pigs?

## **Farmed animals**

The welfare of farmed animals is additionally protected by the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007, which have specific requirements for individual species and types of animal.

For cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, deer and poultry (more than 50 birds) there is a requirement to have a county parish holding (CPH) number from the Rural Payments Agency and be registered with the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA - 03000 200 301).

Different identification and record-keeping requirements apply to individual species. There is no exemption for pets as they are agricultural species that can catch the same diseases as commercial livestock herds (even if you only have one animal) and are therefore subject to the same controls and regulations. If you need any further advice then please contact your local trading standards service.

If you keep 50 or more poultry at any premises you must also be registered on the Great Britain Poultry Register. If you keep fewer than 50 poultry, registration is voluntary. You can register by calling 0800 634 1112 or on the GOV.UK website.

## Further information

You should familiarise yourself with any relevant animal welfare codes produced by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). These are split into two categories, covering farm livestock welfare and pet welfare.

## Penalties

Failure to comply with trading standards law can lead to enforcement action and to sanctions, which may include a fine and/or imprisonment. For more information please see 'Trading standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

## Key legislation

Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and Other Mammals) Order 1974

Animal Welfare Act 2006

Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007

Non-Commercial Movement of Pet Animals Order 2011

Last reviewed / updated: March 2020

## In this update

No major changes

## Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links may only show the original version of the legislation, although some amending legislation is linked to separately where it is directly related to the content of a guide. Information on amendments to legislation can be found on each link's 'More Resources' tab.

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