



Pet business permits in King County: What you need to know

Guide for owners and operators of pet-related businesses

Environmental Health Services Division

Welcome

Before starting a pet business, you'll need to familiarize yourself with local and state regulations regarding permitting, licensing, zoning, sanitation, and animal welfare.

In this guide, you'll find information on getting the proper permits, designing your space, and creating a business plan that supports the health and safety of you, your staff, and the animals.



Types of pet businesses that require a Public Health permit

- Pet daycare
- Pet boarding
- Grooming services (standard grooming, U-Wash, self-service wash stations, nail trim services)
- Mobile grooming
- Animal shelters (pet adoption locations)
- Cat cafes
- Pet shops that sell animals or fish
- Sales of poultry (chicks, chickens, ducks, etc.)
- Pet food retailers (sales of foods that require temperature control or bulk dried animal parts)
- Dog and cat breeders



Licensing and permits for pet businesses

Before starting on your Public Health permit, you'll need to research and obtain all necessary licenses and permits from local and state government agencies. These include:

- Approval from your local building/land use department
- Approval from Public Health if you are on a septic system
- Plumbing/building/electrical/fire permits (be sure to work with a contractor to have materials professionally installed)
- Labor and Industries requirements
- A business license from Washington State or your local city



Common question: can I operate my pet business out of my home?

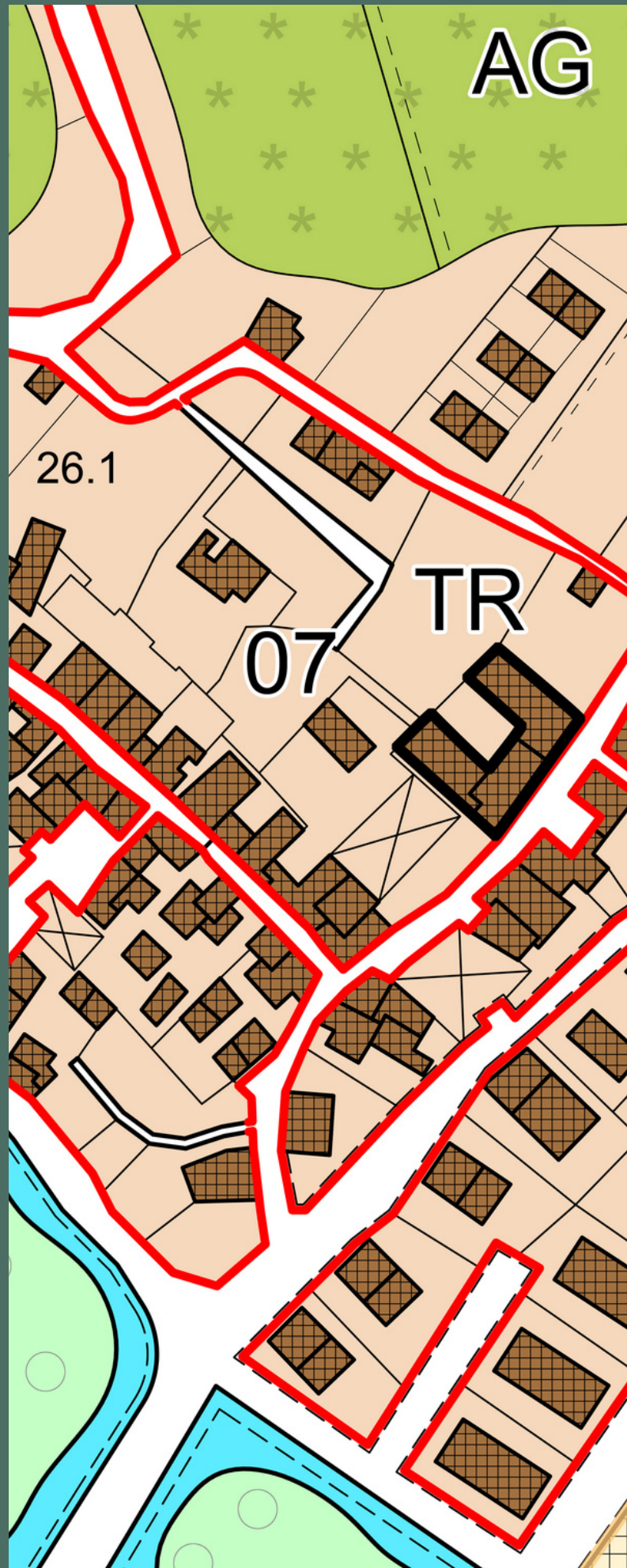
Usually, the answer is no. In most cities, and unincorporated King County, zoning regulations prevent pet businesses from operating out of a home. Residential properties don't meet the legal standards needed to provide healthy and safe environments for pet businesses. For example, home-based operations often receive complaints about noise and odor.

Check with your local jurisdiction to confirm before starting your business or purchasing a property. There may be some exceptions, such as for pet grooming or cat boarding.

I'm a pet sitter through Rover or WAG. Can I board dogs and cats in my home?

When pet sitting through WAG or Rover, you can only keep up to 3 animals in your home at a time - including your own animals. Keeping four or more animals for commercial purposes counts as a business, and you'll need to get a permit from Public Health - in addition to other permits. And, you likely won't be able to operate out of your home.





Zoning and land use

Your pet business must follow local zoning laws. Typically, these businesses must be located in commercial or industrial zones. This ensures your business is located in an area that's appropriate for the operation and doesn't conflict with other businesses or residential areas.

Your pet business must also follow local land use regulations. These include restrictions on the size and type of pet business, as well as requirements for the number and type of animals that can be kept on the premises. Additionally, pet businesses may be required to adhere to regulations to reduce noise and odors, and must comply with any applicable environmental regulations - for instance, stormwater for an outdoor area.

Land use planners will also look at emergency access to the property for fire and rescue access as well as situation near critical areas such as creeks and wetlands.

It is important for pet businesses to understand and comply with all applicable zoning and land use regulations in order to operate in King County.

Septic System Considerations



If your business has a septic system, you will need to have a review by Public Health's On-site sewage system (OSS) program. Wastewater from pet businesses cannot be dumped to the ground or flushed to a septic system. You may need to plan for a holding tank and associated permits.

Contact the Public Health - Seattle & King County OSS program to learn more:
www.kingcounty.gov/oss

Plumbing permits

Pet-related businesses are commercial projects that may require a plumbing permit if any plumbing changes are made.

Public Health issues plumbing and gas piping permits, and performs inspections, in the following jurisdictions:

- Seattle
- Unincorporated King County
- Beaux Arts
- Clyde Hill

If your business is in another King County city, you will need to get plumbing and gas piping permits from that city's building department. If you are uncertain of the city boundaries, please use the King County Parcel Viewer to check.

For more information about the Public Health - Seattle & King County Plumbing and Gas Piping program, visit: www.kingcounty.gov/plumbing



What requires a plumbing permit?

A plumbing permit is required for tasks such as adding or changing plumbing fixtures, as well as re-piping or moving pipes.



Hot Water Tank



Dishwasher



Sinks

Prep sinks, Utility sinks, Mop sinks



Washing Machines



Spiggots



Tubs

Grooming Tubs (hair traps)

Can I do my own plumbing?

Plumbing can be installed by the business owner or a licensed plumbing contractor. We recommend you use a licensed plumber for all plumbing changes.

If you decide to do your own plumbing, the business owner or the tenant can obtain plumbing permits and perform the work.



Getting your Public Health permit

Next, we'll cover the key steps to getting a Public Health permit for your pet business. This includes what the process is like, as well as the important rules you'll need to know and follow.

These rules are based on regulations the King County Board of Health established for pet-related businesses in 2010. You can read the regulations (King County Board of Health Title 8, Chapter 8.03) online: <https://kingcounty.gov/en/-/media/king-county/depts/dph/documents/about-public-health/board-of-health/boh-code-title-8.pdf>



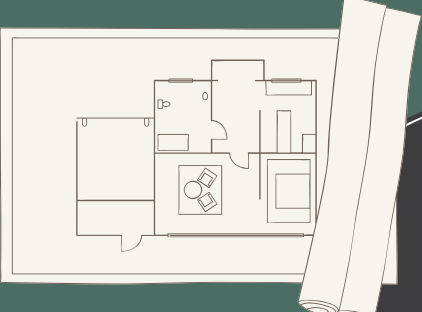
How long does it take to get a Public Health Permit?

Permit approval may take 2-6 months from submission. To avoid delays and additional costs, submit your plan application early and ensure it is complete before submission.

Step 2: Apply for your public health plan review



Step 1: Obtain your zoning, landuse, building permits, etc.



Step 3: Receive approval of your plans and finish construction



Step 4: Pay for your operational permit and schedule your pre-operational inspection



Step 5: Complete your pre-operational inspection



Step 6: Open your business!



Outdoor area considerations

Outdoor areas should be designed to minimize wastewater runoff from the property. Pet business wastewater is a mixture of feces, urine, cleaners, and disinfectants, and can't go into a storm drain. If you have an outdoor area, you'll have to go through Public Health plan review to receive approval.

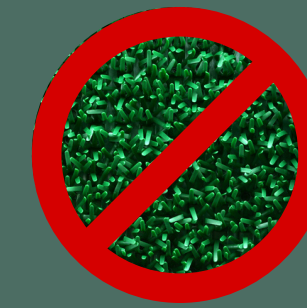
Things to keep in mind

1. Artificial turf is not approved for use (see the next page for more).
2. Natural lawn may be approved if it can be free of mud and well maintained.
3. Woodchips, gravel, and concrete/asphalt are common and approved covers.
4. Asphalt/concrete and gravel can get hot in the summer months.
5. Make sure you design the space to have good drainage.
6. Talk with your city's stormwater program for guidance to prevent wastewater runoff going into storm drains or sensitive areas.

Download our guide for outdoor areas: www.kingcounty.gov/petbusiness



Why is artificial turf not approved?



Artificial turf does not meet the definition of approved surfaces outlined in King County code. Approved surfaces include woodchips, gravel, concrete, asphalt, natural lawn, or natural turf.

Problems with artificial turf:

- It's difficult to clean and disinfect.
- There's significant inconsistency in installations (DIY vs professional).
- The heavy use of chemicals to clean and control odors are damaging to the environment and toxic to marine life.
- It can cause surface and storm water contamination.
- It can contain PFAS, lead, arsenic, and other chemicals harmful to people, pets and the environment.
- Infills such as crumb rubber contain toxic chemicals.
- It sheds microplastics, harming the environment.
- Turf can create heat islands as it does not process carbon dioxide or release oxygen like natural vegetation.
- It suppresses beneficial soil organisms.



Difficult to clean and disinfect



Urine, feces, forever chemicals contaminate soils



Potential to contaminate groundwater or streams

Notice: Businesses who install artificial turf without approvals may be required to remove the turf installation.

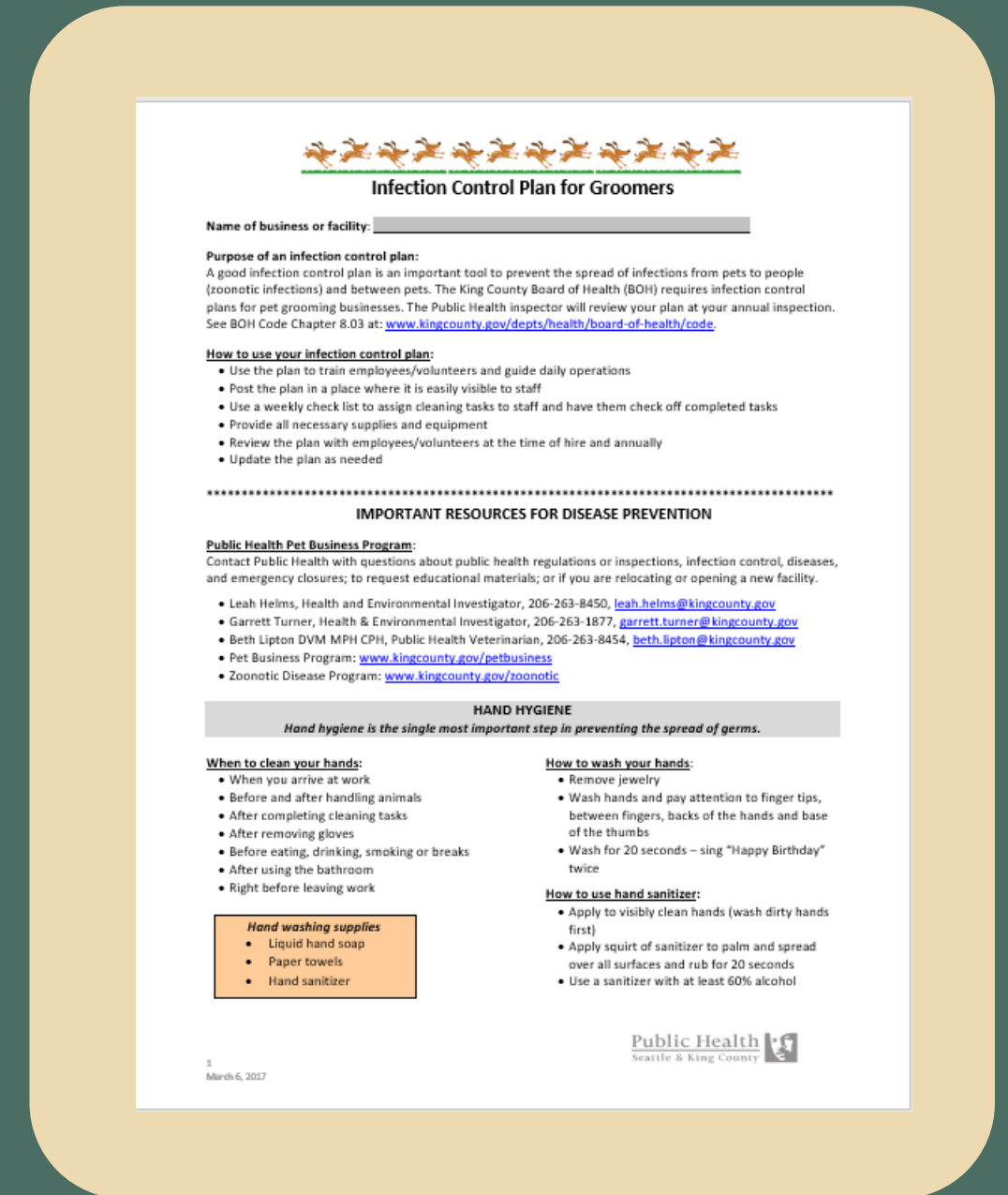
Infection control plans

Per the Public Health permit, King County pet businesses must have an infection control plan. The plan needs to include written procedures for cleaning and disinfecting, as well as protocols for sick and injured animals.

Infection control helps ensure the health and safety of both pets and humans. This involves implementing measures to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, such as regular cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces, equipment, and toys.

It's also important to have protocols in place for handling sick animals and minimizing contact between animals from different homes.

By prioritizing infection control, pet businesses can create a safe and healthy environment for all.



Templates for this plan can be downloaded online at www.kingcounty.gov/petbusiness

Adequate supervision for groups of dogs

King County codes require pet businesses to provide adequate supervision and staffing. This includes:

- Direct supervision when dogs are comingled.
- Adequate supervision for comingled playgroups. We recommend:
 - 1 handler for 1-15 dogs
 - 2 handlers for 16-30 dogs
 - 3 handlers for 31-45 dogs
 - 4 handlers for 46-60 dogs
 - Avoiding groups larger than 60
- Adequate staffing to ensure that feces and urine are removed immediately.
- Trained staff available to implement the infection control plan, isolate ill or injured animals, and perform cleaning and disinfection.
- Maintaining a “person in charge” at all times the facility is open.



Adequate supervision doesn't include staff who are actively grooming or bathing, or monitoring the dogs through webcams.



Rabies vaccines



In Washington State, pet owners are legally required (under WAC 246-100-197) to ensure their dogs, cats, and ferrets are up to date on their rabies vaccinations. They must be vaccinated by the time they're four months old, and revaccinated on a schedule according to the type of vaccine used (as determined by a licensed veterinarian and the vaccine manufacturer's instructions).



A booster vaccination is necessary one year after the initial vaccination, regardless of the animal's age at first vaccination. An animal is considered fully vaccinated immediately after a booster.



Pet daycares, boarders, shelters, groomers, mobile groomers, pet adoption centers, etc. in King County are required to keep a record of current rabies vaccine status for each dog, cat, or ferret in their facility.



See the last slide of this document for resources about rabies.

Common questions about rabies vaccines



Q: Can my business accept puppies, kittens, or ferrets who are not old enough to be vaccinated for rabies?

A: It depends. Puppies and kittens too young for a rabies vaccine can be accepted but should be kept separate from the general population and not comingled. It's best to isolate them until they are fully up to date on all vaccines (not just rabies) and spayed or neutered.



Q: Can I use a rabies titer to meet the requirement?

A: No. Although rabies virus antibody titers indicate how an animal responds to rabies vaccination or exposure to rabies virus, they are not directly related to protection from rabies infection, as other immunologic factors prevent rabies besides antibody titers.



Q: Are there exemptions for rabies vaccinations?

A: No. There are no rabies vaccine exemptions due to age or for pets who are immunocompromised. Pet owners can opt for alternatives such as private home boarding or grooming services. If available, they can also consider boarding or grooming their dog at their veterinarian's clinic.

Rabies vaccine requirements for pet businesses

The King County Board of Health Pet Business regulations (KCBOH 8.03) require rabies vaccinations and records for dogs, cats, and ferrets in pet businesses.

	Pet Shop	Animal Shelter	Pet Daycare	Groomer
Vaccination Requirement	<p>Vaccinate dogs, cats, and ferrets aged four months or older against rabies before sale or adoption.</p> <p>Provide a certificate of rabies vaccination issued by a licensed veterinarian to the purchaser or adopter.</p>	<p>Immunize dogs, cats, and ferrets aged four months or older against rabies before releasing them into foster care or adoption.</p>	<p>Verify each dog, cat, or ferret four months of age or older is currently immunized against rabies by obtaining a copy of a rabies certificate or other verification from a licensed veterinarian or the pet owner.</p> <p>Groomers: Verification or acknowledgment of rabies vaccination is waived at facilities where only pet owners perform the animal nail trim, clipping, grooming, or bathing.</p>	
Records Requirement	<p>Keep veterinary records, including vaccinations, for each animal for at least one year.</p>	<p>Keep records of rabies vaccinations for individual animals for at least a year after leaving the facility.</p>	<p>Keep rabies vaccination records or written acknowledgment from the owner for each animal for at least 365 days after the animal leaves the establishment.</p>	<p>At the time of inspection, groomers must be able to demonstrate how they are verifying rabies vaccination is current.</p>

Other vaccine requirements and recommendations for boarders, pet daycares, groomers, or animal shelters

Consult a licensed veterinarian to determine additional vaccines beyond the mandatory rabies vaccination for your business.

Pet businesses are not allowed to vaccinate pets that are not their own.

Vaccines must be administered under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian or veterinary technician working under a licensed veterinarian (per WAC 246-935-050).

See the last slide of this document for resources about other recommended vaccines.



What to expect for your annual Public Health inspection



Q: How often does the health department inspect my business?

A: Once a Year. This is part of your permit requirements. The owner does not need to present for the inspection.

Q: Will you make an appointment for the inspection?

A: No. Inspections are typically unannounced, and the business is required to provide access during the business's operational hours.

Q: How do I prepare for my inspection?

A: Consult your checklist. An inspection checklist was provided to you at your plan approval and pre-occupational inspection. **You can also download inspection checklists online at www.kingcounty.gov/petbusiness**

Q: What happens if I don't pass my inspection?

A: Your inspector will work with you on a timeline to complete any corrective actions. There may be a fee for re-inspections of half the cost of your annual permit.

Tips for a Successful Inspection

1. Have your infection control plan ready to review.
2. Have your rabies vaccination records current and accessible.
3. Have other records available (bite log, animal acquisitions, bird sales info, etc.).
4. Review your isolation procedure.
5. Post your permit in a visible place.
6. Be prepared to demonstrate how cleaning and disinfection are completed.
7. Keep up on regular maintenance for floors, walls, and surfaces.
8. Ensure your grooming leads are on swivels and non-tightening.

Pet food retail - selling pet food and treats

Retail establishments that sell pet foods and treats need a Public Health permit if they sell:

- Foods and treats that are perishable or require refrigeration or freezing.
- Food and treats that are bulk dried animal body parts (ears, hooves, bones, bully sticks, rawhides).



Per the Public Health permit, pet food retailers must :

- Store food and treats that are bulk dried animal body parts (ears, hooves, bones, bully sticks, rawhides) out of the reach of small children.
- Properly store foods and treats that are perishable or require refrigeration or freezing.
- Provide a sink and toilet facilities.
- Provide hand sanitizer or hand sink for customers.
- Provide bags, tongs or scoops for handling pet food and treats.
- Post hand washing signage where pet treats are displayed.
- Post safe handling instructions on fridges and freezers.

PET FOOD & TREATS SAFE HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS


Pet food and pet treats made from meats or animal products may contain bacteria that could cause illness. For your protection, follow these safe handling instructions.

- ✎ This product is a pet food and is not for human consumption.
- ✎ Preschool age children and people with immune deficiency should not handle these products.
- ✎ Keep pet foods separate from human foods in clearly marked containers or on separate refrigerator shelves.
- ✎ Keep perishable pet foods refrigerated or frozen until ready to use.
- ✎ Thaw frozen pet foods in the refrigerator or microwave, not on the counter.
- ✎ Refrigerate or discard uneaten perishable pet foods within 30 minutes after serving.
- ✎ Wash food preparation surfaces including cutting boards, pet bowls and utensils with hot soapy water or in the dishwasher.
- ✎ Always wash hands with soap and water immediately after handling pet food or treats.

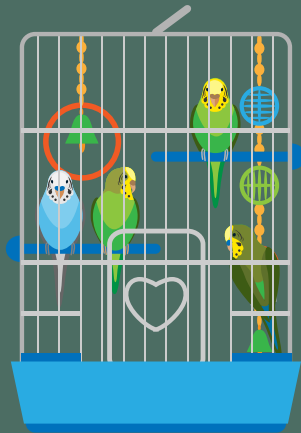
Stop Germs, Stay Healthy!

Zoonotic Disease Program
206-263-9566
www.kingcounty.gov/health/zoonotics

Public Health
Seattle & King County



Public Health rules for birds and poultry



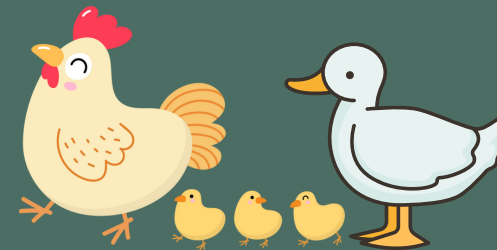
Psittacosis

Psittacosis (also known as Parrot Fever and ornithosis) is caused by a bacteria that can be transmitted to people. Young children and immunocompromised people are at higher risk.

Businesses selling pet birds must:

- Display approved Psittacosis warning signs at all bird displays.
- Maintain records of sales and acquisition, including bird band # if the bird is banded.
- Provide zoonotic disease prevention information with every purchase.
- Keep your infection control plan up to date.
- Routinely clean and disinfect enclosures.
- Provide a handwashing sink or hand sanitizer for the public.
- Provide vet care.
- Provide an isolation area for sick birds.

Salmonella and Poultry



Every year, hundreds of people in the US contract *Salmonella* from baby poultry.

Businesses selling baby poultry must:

- Display *Salmonella* prevention signs at all poultry displays.
- Provide *Salmonella* information with every purchase.
- Have and use an infection control plan.
- Clean and disinfect enclosures between each batch of birds.
- Provide a handwashing sink or hand sanitizer for the public.
- Provide an isolation area for sick birds.
- Keep records of sales and acquisitions.

Public Health rules for pocket pets



Types of Pocket Pets

- Hamsters
- Guinea pigs
- Chinchillas
- Gerbils
- Fancy rats
- Mice
- Rabbits
- Degus (USDA reg)
- Hedgehogs (USDA reg)
- Prairie dogs (USDA reg)

Zoonotic Disease Risks

- Salmonella
- Ring worm (fungus)
- LCMV (Lymphocytic choriomeningitis)
- Rat Bite Fever
- Leptospirosis
- Plague
- Seoul virus
- Hantavirus

Businesses selling small animals must:

- Display safe handling instructions.
- Not use cedar shavings for bedding.
- Provide appropriate food for the species.
- Provide adequate water.
- Provide zoonotic disease information with the sale of each pet.
- Keep records of sales and acquisitions.
- Provide a handwashing sink or hand sanitizers for customers.
- Provide vet care.
- Provide an isolation area for sick animals.
- Keep an updated infection control plan.

Public Health rules for reptiles and amphibians



Salmonella, a bacteria associated with reptiles and amphibians, can make people sick. Pet businesses that sell or adopt reptiles and amphibians must meet the following requirements, per their Public Health permit:



- Display *Salmonella* warning signage on reptile and amphibian enclosures.
- Provide a handwashing sink or hand sanitizer for customers.
- Provide disease prevention and safe handling instructions with the sale or adoption of each pet.
- Provide adequate enclosures with appropriate environmental conditions for the needs of the species.
- Provide an appropriate diet for the needs of the species.
- Provide vet care.
- Provide isolation areas for sick reptiles and amphibians.
- Keep an updated infection control plan.

Additional information for your pet business

We've covered Public Health requirements and the other permits you're likely to need. Next, we'll discuss a few other key things to think about.



Managing animal bites

Animal bites can be dangerous. They can lead to infections and diseases such as rabies and other viral or bacterial infections that can be life threatening if not treated. Maintaining procedures to address animal bites is essential for the safety and well-being of your employees. You must provide staff training on proper animal handling, restraint, and de-escalation techniques.

As a requirement from Washington State Labor & Industries, you must also keep a bite log with dates, times, and details of bites from animals to humans and animal to animal.

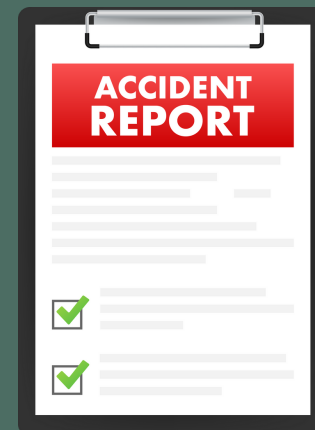
Key steps to take:

Treat it!



The employee should immediately clean the wound with soap and water and seek medical attention if the bite breaks the skin.

Report it!



Document the incident and report it to the appropriate authorities, such as animal control or Labor and Industries. If a dog, cat, or ferret bites a human it may be subject to a 10 day quarantine.

Follow up!



Follow-up with the pet owner and the veterinarian about the incident and ensure all vaccinations are up to date.

Can pet shops sell puppies and kittens?



Pet shops in King County are prohibited to sell puppies, kittens, cats, and dogs, unless they have been selling them since before 2021.

This is based on a law passed by the Washington State Legislature in April 2023, which prohibits the sales of dogs and cats by retail pet stores. Stores that sold cats and dogs prior to 2021 may continue to do so.

Since July 2021, Public Health - Seattle & King County has not issued new permits for stores that sell cats or dogs.

Reference: <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2023-24/Pdf/Amendments/Senate/1424-S.E%20AMS%20ENGR%20S2603.E.pdf>

10 important considerations when planning your new facility

- **Public Health requirements (not a comprehensive list):**
 - Provide an adequately-ventilated isolation area with space to hold 10% of your population (1 kennel for every 10 dogs or cats).
 - Do not use artificial turf.
 - Use cleanable surfaces (no carpets, rugs, sofas, mattresses, soft furniture).
 - Create and follow operational procedures for cleaning and disinfection.
- **Best practices/industry standards/requirements from other agencies:**
 - Maintain good ventilation to promote healthy indoor air and prevent the spread of diseases.
 - Plan for drainage and wastewater in outdoor areas. Dumping wastewater to the ground or an outdoor drain is not allowed.
 - Maintain an emergency plan for natural disasters (fire, earthquake, flooding).
 - Maintain smoke detectors and fire suppression systems (these may be required by building officials).
 - Provide employee safety training for handling animals and animal bite prevention.
 - Create a staffing plan to ensure adequate supervision.



Additional resources for businesses

Visit our website: www.kingcounty.gov/petbusiness. You'll find:

- For pet daycares, boarders, groomers, shelters, and adoptions:
 - Infection control plans
 - Disinfectant fact sheets
 - Rabies requirement fact sheet
 - Past editions of our newsletter
 - Inspection checklists
- For pet shops, aquariums, and poultry retailers:
 - Infection Control Plan
 - Quarterly Acquisition form
 - Quarterly sales report form for birds, dogs, cats and ferrets
 - Zoonotic Diseases Information Flyer - Info for customers who purchase pets
 - Salmonella display signs for reptiles and amphibians
 - Salmonella display signs for poultry
 - Psittacosis warning sign
 - Inspection checklists
- For pet food retailers:
 - Information on risky pet food products and salmonella prevention signage
 - Warning signs for raw pet foods and foods that can spoil
 - Cleaning and disinfection guidance

To learn more, visit our website at www.kingcounty.gov/petbusiness or contact us via email at petbusinesses@kingcounty.gov.

Resources for rabies and other vaccines

Rabies

- King County Board of Health Code Title 8: Zoonotic Disease Regulations: <https://kingcounty.gov/en/-/media/depts/health/board-of-health/documents/code/BOH-Code-Title-8.ashx>
- King County Rabies Fact Sheet for Pet Businesses: <https://kingcounty.gov/en/legacy/depts/health/communicable-diseases/zoonotic/-/media/depts/health/communicable-diseases/documents/zoonotic/rabies-vaccination-requirements.ashx>
- Washington Administrative Code: Rabies Measures to Prevent Human Disease: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=246-100-197>
- King County Rabies Resources: <https://kingcounty.gov/en/legacy/depts/health/communicable-diseases/zoonotic/facts-resources/diseases-by-animal/rabies>
- WA State Rabies Resources: <https://doh.wa.gov/you-and-your-family/illness-and-disease-z/rabies>

Other recommended vaccines for dogs and cats

- American Veterinary Medical Association: <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/pet-owners/petcare/vaccinations>
- American Animal Hospital Association Guidelines:
 - Core and Non-Core Vaccinations for canines: <https://www.aaha.org/aaha-guidelines/2022-aaha-canine-vaccination-guidelines/recommendations-for-core-and-noncore-canine-vaccines/#:~:text=Examples%20of%20core%20vaccines%20include,location%2C%20and%20risk%20of%20exposure.>
 - Core vaccinations for felines: [https://www.aaha.org/globalassets/02-guidelines/feline-vaccination-guidelines/resource-center/corevaccinesforpetcats-table.pdf /](https://www.aaha.org/globalassets/02-guidelines/feline-vaccination-guidelines/resource-center/corevaccinesforpetcats-table.pdf/)
 - Vaccination guidelines for shelter cats: <https://www.aaha.org/aaha-guidelines/2020-aahaafp-feline-vaccination-guidelines/core-vaccines-for-shelter-cats/>