

Relocating Your Pet to the United States



A practical guide to federal dog and cat entry rules, rabies-risk pathways, USDA animal-health conditions, state requirements and travel planning.

Personally managed by Julia | Fly Your Tail

The United States does not have one single pet-entry checklist.

Dogs are primarily regulated by CDC, with additional USDA rules for certain disease-risk origins. Cats have simpler federal requirements, but every destination state or territory can impose its own conditions. Airline acceptance is a separate layer.

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The essentials before you begin

The correct pathway depends on the animal species, the dog's travel history during the previous 6 months, where the rabies vaccination was administered, USDA disease status, the destination state and the airline.

Dogs - universal CDC conditions

Every dog must appear healthy, be at least 6 months old, have a detectable microchip and travel with a CDC Dog Import Form receipt.

Low-risk or rabies-free history

If the dog has been only in dog-rabies-free or low-risk countries for the previous 6 months, the CDC Dog Import Form is generally the only CDC document.

High-risk history

Dogs that have been in any high-risk country during the previous 6 months need additional rabies documentation. Foreign-vaccinated dogs also require a CDC-registered animal care facility reservation.

Cats

Cats are inspected at entry and must appear free of communicable disease. Federal proof of rabies vaccination is generally not required, but states and airlines may require it.

USDA conditions

Dogs from screwworm-affected origins need official certification. Dogs from FMD-affected origins must meet cleanliness and post-arrival separation precautions.

State rules

The final U.S. state or territory may require rabies vaccination, a health certificate, testing, permits or quarantine.

Special destinations

- Hawaii and Guam have separate rabies-control and quarantine programmes, even for animals arriving from the U.S. mainland.
- Commercial resale, adoption and some rescue movements are subject to additional USDA rules.
- Birds, reptiles and exotic animals may involve USDA, CDC, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state authorities.

Start with the dog's 6-month travel history.

For dogs, the countries visited - not only the final departure country - determine whether the high-risk rabies pathway applies.

DOG ENTRY PATHWAYS

Which CDC pathway applies?

Dog situation	Core CDC documents	Entry implications
Only in rabies-free or low-risk countries during previous 6 months	CDC Dog Import Form receipt	May arrive at the port listed on the receipt. The dog must still meet age, health and microchip rules.
U.S.-vaccinated dog that visited a high-risk country	CDC Dog Import Form receipt + USDA-endorsed Certification of U.S.-Issued Rabies Vaccination	Can generally enter at any airport, seaport or land crossing matching the receipt. The CDC vaccination form must have been completed before the dog left the U.S.
Foreign-vaccinated dog that visited a high-risk country	CDC Dog Import Form + government-endorsed Certification of Foreign Rabies Vaccination and Microchip + CDC facility reservation	Must arrive at the airport associated with a CDC-registered animal care facility. Examination and revaccination occur at the facility; a valid CDC-approved titer can avoid the 28-day quarantine.
Dog with high-risk history but no valid rabies vaccination	Not eligible	The dog will not be allowed to enter under the ordinary CDC pet-import process.

Requirements that apply to all dogs

- At least 6 months old on the date of entry.
- Appears healthy on arrival.
- Microchip detectable by a universal scanner.
- Microchip implanted before the rabies vaccination used for entry when rabies documentation is required.
- One CDC Dog Import Form per dog, with accurate arrival port and travel details.

The CDC form is not a booking confirmation.

The form does not replace airline approval, USDA disease certification, state requirements or a CDC-registered facility reservation when one is required.

Foreign-vaccinated dogs: the most controlled pathway

1**Confirm high-risk travel history**

Check every country the dog has visited during the 6 months before U.S. entry against the current CDC high-risk list.

2**Verify microchip and rabies vaccination**

The microchip must precede the qualifying rabies vaccination and appear consistently on all records.

3**Plan the rabies serology test**

A valid result from a CDC-approved laboratory is optional but highly important: without it, the dog normally completes a 28-day quarantine after revaccination at the CDC facility.

4**Reserve a CDC-registered animal care facility**

The reservation is mandatory and determines the approved U.S. arrival airport. The facility provides examination, revaccination and quarantine when required.

5**Complete the foreign rabies certificate**

The Certification of Foreign Rabies Vaccination and Microchip must be completed no more than 30 days before travel and endorsed by an official government veterinarian.

6**Submit the CDC Dog Import Form**

Complete a separate online form for each dog and make sure the airport matches the facility reservation.

7**Travel with the complete document pack**

Carry the form receipt, two copies of the endorsed foreign vaccination certificate, facility reservation and serology report where available.

8**Complete facility services after arrival**

Follow the facility's instructions for examination, revaccination, collection and any required quarantine.

OTHER DOG PATHWAYS

Low-risk dogs and returning U.S.-vaccinated dogs

Dogs with only low-risk or rabies-free travel history

- Complete one CDC Dog Import Form per dog.
- Use a recent full-body and face photograph; for a dog under one year, the photo should be taken within 15 days of travel.
- Confirm the dog is at least 6 months old, appears healthy and has a detectable microchip.
- The departure country and arrival port on the receipt must match the actual journey. Submit a new form if details change.
- Check USDA, state and airline requirements separately.

U.S.-vaccinated dogs returning from a high-risk country

- Before the dog leaves the United States, a USDA-accredited veterinarian must complete the specific CDC Certification of U.S.-Issued Rabies Vaccination in USDA's system and obtain USDA endorsement.
- A normal vaccination certificate is not a substitute.
- USDA-endorsed export health certificates issued after 31 July 2025 are not accepted as the re-entry document for this pathway.
- The CDC Dog Import Form receipt and the endorsed CDC vaccination form must accompany the dog.
- If the required U.S.-issued form was not obtained before departure, the dog must follow the foreign-vaccinated high-risk pathway, including a CDC facility reservation.

Prepare the U.S. return document before leaving America.

This is particularly important for expatriate families and frequent travellers. The form cannot be issued retroactively after the dog is abroad.

CATS AND STATE RULES

Cats have simpler federal entry - but not zero requirements

Federal entry for cats	State, territory and airline layer
- Cats are inspected at the U.S. port of entry. - They may be refused or referred for veterinary examination if they show signs of a communicable disease. - Federal proof of rabies vaccination is generally not required for ordinary cat entry. - Any required examination, testing or treatment is at the owner's expense.	- Many states require current rabies vaccination and may require a certificate of veterinary inspection. - Hawaii and Guam operate separate pre-arrival testing, permit and quarantine systems. - Airlines may require a recent health certificate even when federal authorities do not. - Local breed, import, housing and licensing rules may apply after arrival.

State planning checklist

- Identify the final state or territory, not only the U.S. arrival airport.
- Check the state agriculture or animal-health authority for current entry rules.
- Confirm whether the state requires a health certificate, rabies record, permit or advance notification.
- If the animal changes flights inside the United States, check airline transit and domestic acceptance rules.
- Plan onward road or air transport only after estimating border and cargo-release time.

Federal entry does not guarantee state compliance.

A cat or dog can satisfy CDC and USDA requirements but still have a problem at destination if state or territory rules were not checked.

Screwworm, FMD and commercial movements

Dogs from screwworm-affected regions

- The dog must be inspected within 5 days before shipment.
- An official government veterinarian must certify that the dog is free from screwworm, or was treated and held until free.
- USDA does not prescribe one fixed template; the statement may be standalone or included in an official export health certificate.
- For dogs from Mexico, an authorised clinical veterinarian may issue the certification under the special USDA arrangement.
- The affected-region list can change rapidly and must be checked immediately before preparation.

Dogs from foot-and-mouth disease affected regions

- Fur and bedding must be free of excessive dirt, hay and straw.
- The dog should be bathed after arrival and kept separate from livestock for 5 days.
- USDA does not currently require a specific FMD document for privately owned pet dogs, but the practical precautions still apply.

Commercial, adoption and rescue dogs

- Dogs imported for resale, adoption or other commercial purposes may be regulated by USDA Animal Care.
- Additional age, health, vaccination, importer and port requirements may apply.
- Do not label a commercial movement as a personal pet relocation merely because an individual accompanies the dog.

Disease-status lists are dynamic.

New World screwworm and other outbreaks can trigger temporary controls. The current USDA APHIS region-status pages take precedence over any static guide.

TRANSPORT AND ARRIVAL

Planning the physical journey

- Dogs and cats may travel in cabin, as accompanied baggage or as manifested cargo when the airline, aircraft, route and animal qualify. U.S. government rules do not guarantee airline acceptance.
- Foreign-vaccinated high-risk dogs must arrive at the airport linked to their CDC-registered animal care facility reservation.
- Large kennels, restricted breeds, brachycephalic pets and extreme weather can limit airline options.
- Manifested-cargo arrivals may require an air waybill, cargo terminal collection, customs release and destination handling.
- The arrival port on the CDC Dog Import Form must match the actual entry location. Changes require a new form.

Common mistakes that delay U.S. imports

Checking only the departure country: CDC uses the dog's complete previous 6-month travel history.

Using a normal rabies certificate: High-risk pathways require specific CDC forms and official endorsements.

Vaccinating before microchipping: The vaccination may be invalid for CDC entry purposes.

Missing the CDC facility reservation: Foreign-vaccinated high-risk dogs cannot board without it.

Arriving at the wrong airport: The port must match the CDC form and, when applicable, the facility reservation.

Ignoring screwworm certification: USDA can refuse or delay a dog from an affected region without the official statement.

Assuming cats need no planning: State, airline and health-certificate rules may still apply.

Forgetting state requirements: Federal approval is only one layer of U.S. entry.

Before booking, confirm these 10 points

- The animal's species and purpose of movement are correctly classified.
- The dog's previous 6-month country history is complete.
- The dog is at least 6 months old and has a readable microchip.
- Rabies vaccination follows the microchip and is valid where required.
- The correct CDC vaccination certificate and endorsements are available.
- A CDC facility reservation is confirmed when required.
- USDA screwworm or other animal-health conditions are satisfied.
- The destination state or territory requirements are complete.
- The airline accepts the animal, breed, kennel and route.
- Arrival handling, customs, facility services and onward delivery are arranged.

How we support a United States relocation

Fly Your Tail can coordinate the complete relocation or only the complex stages. Every case is personally managed by Julia, with one point of contact across regulatory preparation, airline planning and arrival.

- CDC pathway and 6-month travel-history assessment
- High-risk country and rabies-document review
- Foreign or U.S.-issued CDC vaccination-form planning
- CDC-registered animal care facility coordination
- Rabies-serology sample logistics where useful
- USDA screwworm and disease-status assessment
- Destination-state requirement review
- Travel-kennel sizing and airline route planning
- Cargo, customs, arrival handling and home-delivery coordination
- Travel-day monitoring and problem resolution

Planning a move to the United States?

Send Fly Your Tail your pet's species, breed, age, weight, measurements, countries visited during the previous 6 months, vaccination history, U.S. state of destination and preferred travel date for an individual assessment.

Official references used for this guide

CDC - Bringing a Dog into the United States

<https://www.cdc.gov/importation/dogs/>

CDC - Dog rabies high-risk countries

<https://www.cdc.gov/importation/dogs/high-risk-countries.html>

CDC - Dogs from rabies-free or low-risk countries

<https://www.cdc.gov/importation/dogs/rabies-free-low-risk-countries.html>

CDC - Foreign-vaccinated dogs from high-risk countries

<https://www.cdc.gov/importation/dogs/foreign-vaccinated-high-risk-countries.html>

CDC - U.S.-vaccinated dogs from high-risk countries

<https://www.cdc.gov/importation/dogs/us-vaccinated-high-risk-countries.html>

USDA APHIS - Bring a pet dog into the United States

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/pet-travel/another-country-to-us-import/dogs>

USDA APHIS - Bring a pet to the United States

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/pet-travel/another-country-to-us-import>

USDA APHIS - State and territory animal entry requirements

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/pet-travel/state-to-state>

Important disclaimer

This guide is general information prepared in August 2026. CDC rules, USDA disease-status controls, state requirements, airline policies and approved facilities can change. Current official government instructions and airline acceptance take precedence. Fly Your Tail verifies the applicable requirements for each individual case before travel.