

What are the basics in boarding cattery care?



international cat care

You want to be sure your cat won't escape



This sounds very basic, but cats do escape if the cattery is not built, maintained or managed properly. The cattery must have:

- **Individual cat units** which are built to be secure and are properly maintained so that there are no holes or gaps through which a cat can squeeze.
- **A 'safety corridor' or 'safety area'** outside the cat's unit, like an airlock in a spaceship. Cats can get past someone opening the door with food or to clean – some are pretty fast and slippery! The outside door must always be kept shut when the inside one is opened and vice versa. This ensures the cat is safely contained and cannot reach the outside. Trained staff who understand the importance of door-shutting are equally important, as the only way a cat can escape from this set-up is by human error – and this should be an exceptionally rare occurrence in any well-run cattery.

You want to be sure that your cat will be warm and comfortable

There are different types of cattery out there – some are totally indoors, some have units like little chalets that also have an outdoor run, and some are sort of in-between. You might instinctively think you want your cat to stay indoors, but it can be much more rewarding and healthier for it to have an outdoor run (safely enclosed to prevent escape) which is in the fresh air as this provides better ventilation which will remove smells and infective organisms in the air. Inside the unit there should be a cosy bed, and a heater in case it gets cold. The heater has to be safe – there are various different types from radiators or pipes to infrared bulbs. A cat flap will let the cat in and out of the chalet or unit into the run so that it can choose where it wants to be.

You want to ensure your cat does not catch a disease

Where you have a lot of cats together there is a chance to spread viral or bacterial disease. Some of these organisms love to hop from cat to cat given the opportunity. They do this via grooming, via droplets from sneezes, through bites, through contact with faeces, from shared food-bowls, or even from the clothes of people who've touched cats that are excreting viruses. If you have several cats that live together they will probably already have shared each other's bacteria and viruses. However, if cats are brought together in a cattery, the cattery must do its utmost to ensure that they don't catch anything from other cats that they're looking after. This is where the design and management of the cattery come into effect. Basic principles of disease control mean that cats from different households should never be able to touch each other, and they should be protected from the danger of another cat sneezing on them or from transmitting disease on the hands or clothes of cattery carers or on food-bowls or litter trays. How is this done?

- **The design of the cattery is important** – the individual cat units can be alongside each other, but they need to be separated either by an impermeable barrier such as Perspex or by a wide gap, often referred to as a 'sneeze barrier' as that's its function. Cats should never be able to touch each other through the mesh.
- **Avoid communal runs.** Some catteries offer communal areas where cats share a large space with other cats (not from the same household). Many owners naively think this will be lovely – the cat will have 'friends' and it will be able to run around and play with them. However, the majority cats don't want to share space with a cat they don't know and will be very stressed by this. In addition such communal spaces enable cats to share litter trays, lick each other and share food-bowls – all potential ways to spread disease.
- **Avoid exercise areas.** If the cattery says that their cats go out into a communal area to exercise and then back into their individual pens, avoid it like the plague – this is a potential virus-sharing scenario too.
- **Don't spread diseases on hands.** You may see notices for visitors not to touch the cats because stroking them can spread disease. Cattery proprietors themselves should wash their hands between handling cats, and many now use hand-washes like the ones hospital staff use to prevent the spread of infection and MRSA.
- **Vaccinations are vital** for a cat coming into a cattery because of the presence of lots of cats and therefore viruses, and a cattery must ask to see the cat's vaccination certificate as proof that its inoculations are up to date, in order to protect both your cat and the other cats in the cattery. It is recommended that your cat has an annual booster against cat flu and enteritis if it is going into a boarding cattery.
- **Clean and disinfected.** The cattery proprietor should understand the importance of keeping the cattery meticulously clean and disinfected and will be able to explain how that is done. The cattery should not smell and litter trays should be cleaned regularly. Uneaten wet food should be removed and food and water bowls kept clean. Food bowls should be washed in a separate area to litter trays.

You want your cat to have room to move around

- Cats should be in individual runs (except cats from the same household which come in together) that are kept meticulously clean and should never come into contact with cats from another household. If the cattery is well built and the runs are about 6ft by 4ft (1.8m by 1.2m), with shelves to sunbathe on, and the run is equipped with something for cats to play with and sharpen their claws on, they'll be very content.

You want your cat to be relaxed and secure (but not bored!)

- The presence of a lot of barking and excited dogs in kennels near a cattery can be very stressful for cats, so choose a cattery which has no kennels on the premises or one well separated from kennels.
- Many catteries will let owners bring in familiar bedding or toys to help the cat feel secure because they smell familiar. Likewise a cat scratch post from home can help them settle in.
- Cats like high places – they will seldom sit on the ground if there is somewhere higher up – the same applies in a cattery. A shelf in the cat sleeping accommodation and in the run will give the cat a chance to climb up and view the world – making it feel much more secure.
- Routine makes cats feel secure – they know when they're going to be fed, they see when people come and go and they don't feel threatened.
- Many excellent catteries plant butterfly attracting plants around the cattery to provide interest and movement for the cats to view.

You want your cat to eat well

Good cattery proprietors will find out about your cat's regular food and try to feed it the same food as at home. This may be difficult if you feed lots of fresh food or if you feed a special prescription diet (in which case you will need to bring this in for the cattery to feed). They will monitor the amount eaten and if your cat needs a little encouragement to eat will try different things to help it feel relaxed and happy to eat.

You want your cat to be watched and monitored

Good proprietors will monitor your cat – they'll even have what's called a 'pee and poo' chart which records what happens in the litter tray, as well as noting what the cat is eating. This gives them a very good idea of the cat's wellbeing, as well as enabling them to notice if it has an upset stomach and so on.

Any cat that's unwell will be taken to the vet – and again, a good cattery will ask you for details of your own vet as well as asking you to sign a consent form allowing them to contact a vet and give treatment if it's necessary.

Make sure you give details of how to contact you or ask someone to be the contact while you are away – it is unlikely your cat will be ill but if it is old or something occurs, someone may have to make a decision about what is best for it or whether you want it to have treatment etc.

You want your cat to have tender loving care

For most of us our cats are important members of the family and we want them to be looked after with the same care and consideration that we give them. That's down to the people caring for the cats and the enthusiasm and dedication they give to the job.

If you look at the very best catteries you'll recognise that the people involved love cats and each one is important to them. There's attention to detail and knowledge behind that care which comes from their love of cats.

Most cats actually adapt very quickly and as long as they feel secure in their new environment and they have food, warmth and toilet facilities they make the best of the cosiness and the run to sleep and watch everything going on in the cattery's daily routine.

You need help with your cat's special requirements

- Most catteries will give medication if it's required and a few of the best will even give treatment such as insulin injections for diabetic cats. Obviously, if you have a higher maintenance cat that needs such medication you need to search out a cattery that's capable of providing the required treatment.
- If your cat is infirm or disabled it may not be able to climb a ladder/ramp if the cattery is of a 'penthouse' design where the sleeping accommodation is a raised box accessed by a ramp. The proprietor may have some units where the accommodation is at ground level or may be able to build a much more gently sloping series of steps up to the box.



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