



Animal Care Tech Note

Daily Observation

Under the Animal Welfare Act, dealers, exhibitors, and research facilities must observe all animals daily to assess their health and well-being. This ensures prompt detection of disease or injuries and abnormal behavior, helping to improve outcomes and save time and money. For example, an animal that has a small laceration may only require minimal treatment. The same laceration observed several days later may be infected and require more extensive and expensive treatment with a higher risk to the animal's health and well-being.

Daily observations can be done by the attending veterinarian or someone else—the veterinarian's staff, the facility's staff, or the licensee or registrant—if there is a mechanism in place to convey timely and accurate information to the attending veterinarian.

Consistency Is Key

If you are the licensee or registrant, talk to your attending veterinarian to develop a method for conducting daily observations. Consider using tools like checklists to ensure all observations are consistent and effective. Maintain a list of what needs to be done regularly, such as facility repairs, nail clipping/grooming, giving medications, and other tasks. Use this "to-do list" for planning, care, and maintenance in addition to daily observations. Train your staff to follow the facility's protocol for conducting observations, documenting observations, and communicating with the attending veterinarian.

Tips for Effective Daily Observation

- 1. Focus.** Make observing and assessing an animal's health and well-being a single and separate task. Don't combine it with other tasks or chores, or you could miss something important.
- 2. Watch.** Carefully observe the behavior of each animal, each body part of the animal, and any feces or discharge for abnormalities.
- 3. Support.** Take video and photographs of all abnormal or questionable observations. Keep a record of all contacts with the attending veterinarian, including animal identification; date; description of the problem; method used to contact the attending veterinarian (phone, text, email, visit); and the attending veterinarian's advice. Log daily observations in a notebook, binder, spreadsheet, or database.



Daily Observation Guidelines

When conducting daily observations, assess each animal's physical appearance, behavior, and environment. Consider handling the animal if safe to do so. If the animal is under veterinary care, assess the effectiveness of treatment. Below are questions to ask during daily observations.

Physical Appearance

- Is the haircoat normal? Is it glossy or dull? Are there signs of hair loss?
- Is the animal under- or over-weight? Can you see the ribs? Include weekly weight checks in the observation program.
- Is the animal scratching itself? Do you see scabbing, lumps, bumps, or parasites?
- Are their nails, claws, or hooves the proper length? Do you see any wounds or abnormalities?
- Do you see any calluses on their joints? Any signs of mobility problems or lameness?
- Are the eyes clear? Is there discharge or excessive winking or blinking?
- Are the ears and nose clean? Is there any discharge or buildup?
- Are the mouth, teeth, and gums clean? Is there visible buildup (tartar), bleeding, or injuries?



Behavior

- Is the animal acting and moving normally? Is its gait normal?
- Is the animal lethargic or acting sick, stressed, or bored?
- Does the animal's behavior change when you move closer or farther away? For example, does the animal act normally when you are close, but then limps, appears injured, or acts differently when you walk away?
- Is the animal huddling or shivering due to cold? Is it panting or laying stretched out due to heat?
- Does it appear to be eating and drinking? Is it eating and drinking enough?
- Is the animal's elimination habit abnormal, such as loose or irregular stool, vomit, and/or regurgitated food or water?

Environment

- Is the animal's environment and/or enclosure safe?
- Are environmental controls (temperature, humidity, shelter from elements) adequate for the species and the season?

Animals Under Veterinary Care

- Is the animal's health improving, about the same, or getting worse with treatment?
- If the animal's condition is getting worse, or the animal has completed treatment and not improved, is it time to call the veterinarian with an update?
- Are you documenting your observations and treatment plan?

For More Information

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