

Animal Care Tech Note

Animal Welfare Regulations for Domestic Dogs, Wild or Exotic Dogs, and Their Hybrids

The Animal Welfare Regulations (AWR) include standards for the care and welfare of animals used for regulated purposes, including domestic, wild, or exotic dogs. However, domestic dogs, wild or exotic dogs like wolves and coyotes, and any hybrids of these species are not all subject to the same requirements. The information below will help you find and apply the appropriate requirements for your animals. Pet animals kept solely for companionship are not regulated; therefore, these definitions do not apply to them.

Defining Domestic, Hybrid, Wild, and Exotic Dogs

The AWR define “dog” as “any live or dead domestic dog (*Canis familiaris*) or any dog-hybrid cross.” “Wild” and “exotic” animal definitions depend on whether a species has typically lived in the wild or in foreign countries, regardless of birth in captivity or in the United States. The definition of “hybrid cross” does not specify how recently a cross occurred or contain any references to genetic content. The wide variety of interbreeding between domestic and wild dogs leads to confusion and overlap of these definitions. For example, an exhibit may have an informational poster describing wolves when the acquisition records document them as wolf-dog hybrids. Animal Care **may** consider any of the following to identify an animal as domestic, hybrid, wild, or exotic:

- Permits issued by State departments of wildlife or natural resources or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that identify wild species at the facility
- Genetic screening or lineage documenting purebred or hybrid status
- Acquisition records documenting the species, breed, or type of animal
- Advertising or information about the species used by the facility
- Behavior or temperament during handling or interactive sessions

Sometimes these factors conflict with each other, especially when other agencies differ in their definitions of wild or domestic animals. In these cases, Animal Care will work with the facility to appropriately categorize an animal. Because each regulatory agency has its own definitions, an animal may fall into different categories with different agencies. Once an animal is categorized, the facility must consistently comply with the applicable subpart of the AWR and all other Federal, State, or local statutes that apply to that animal's designation for each agency.



Dogs, wolves, and hybrids are difficult to distinguish by appearance alone.

Standards for Domestic Dogs and Hybrids

Part 3, Subpart A contains specific standards for space, temperature, sanitization, and watering. Subpart A also includes unique requirements for dogs that do not apply to wild or exotic animals, like an exercise plan and medical records. If your animals are categorized as domestic dogs or dog hybrids, you must comply with Subpart A for their care.

Standards for Wild or Exotic Dogs, including Wolves

Part 3, Subpart F covers all warm-blooded mammals not included in Subparts A through E. These standards are less specific so they can accommodate a wide variety of animals. If your animals are wolves or categorized as wild or exotic dogs, you must comply with Subpart F for their care. Additionally, there are specific requirements to obtain a license for regulated activity with wild or exotic dogs (as well as other categories of animals).

At-a-Glance: AWR Requirements for Domestic Dogs and Hybrids, and Wild or Exotic Dogs

The table on the next page highlights the different requirements for domestic dogs and hybrids versus wolves and other wild and exotic dogs. For more information, please see the cited section of the AWR.

Welfare Standard	Requirement for Domestic Dogs and Hybrids	Requirement for Wild or Exotic Dogs
Written Program of Veterinary Care (PVC)	Always required; includes physical exams; schedules for vaccines against rabies, parvovirus, and distemper; parasite testing and treatment; medical records [Sections 2.33/2.40 and 3.13]	Not required if the veterinarian is full-time employee of the facility; no specific requirements for PVC contents, physical exams, treatments, medical records [Section 2.33/2.40 only]
Identification	Tag, approved tattoo, or microchip; traveling exhibitors may use duplicate tags and a record book with descriptions and photos [Section 2.50(a-d)]	Identification required at time of transport, acquisition, sale, or disposal stating species, number, and basic description [Section 2.50(e)]
Records	APHIS Forms 7005 and 7006 required; describe birth date, breed/type, color, markings [Section 2.75(a)]	No required form; fewer details necessary [Section 2.75(b)]
Health Certification	Must have Certificate of Veterinary Inspection by licensed veterinarian during commercial transportation [Section 2.78]	Not specified under the AWR
Holding Period	Dealers must hold dogs for at least 5 days after acquiring before re-selling [Section 2.101]	Not specified under the AWR
Minimum Age for Transport in Commerce	Must be at least 8 weeks old and weaned at time of transport or sale [Section 2.130]	Not specified under the AWR
Handling	Not specifically considered dangerous – direct control during exhibition may or may not apply depending on animal's temperament	Specifically listed as dangerous – direct control and supervision by knowledgeable handler and barriers to ensure public safety required during exhibition [Section 2.131]
Importation	Must meet various requirements to import live dogs [Sections 2.150-2.153]	Not specified under the AWR
General Cleaning of Enclosures	Spot-clean daily [Section 3.1(c)(3)]	As often as necessary [Section 3.131(a)]
Temperature	Indoor/sheltered facilities 45-85°F (must not deviate outside this range for more than 4 consecutive hours); not below 50°F if animals are not acclimated [Sections 3.2(a) and 3.3(a)]	Must protect animals from temperature extremes, promote health, and prevent discomfort [Section 3.126(a)]
Surfaces of Enclosures	Must be impervious to moisture (waterproof) [Sections 3.2(d), 3.3(e), and 3.4(c)]	Not specified under the AWR
Outdoor Housing	Adequately protect from extreme weather, wind/rain break; bedding required when below 50°F; additional clean dry bedding when below 35°F [Section 3.4]	Shelter must afford protection and prevent discomfort (fewer specific requirements); bedding not strictly required [Section 3.127]
Space Requirements	Specific calculation to determine measured floor space [Section 3.6(c)(1)]	Sufficient space to ensure adequate freedom of movement to perform normal postural and social adjustments [Section 3.128]
Compatibility	Specific restrictions on grouping dogs together [Sections 3.6(c)(2) and 3.7]	Must be compatible; not housed near animals that interfere with health or cause discomfort [Section 3.133]
Exercise Plan	Must develop, document, and follow plan; double the minimum space required if singly housed and no additional exercise offered [Section 3.8]	Not specified under the AWR
Watering	Water available continuously; receptacles sanitized at least every 2 weeks [Section 3.10]	Water provided and receptacles sanitized as often as necessary to support health and comfort [Section 3.130]
Sanitization of Enclosures	At least every 2 weeks or as often as necessary [Section 3.11(b)(2)]	After an infectious disease, or as directed by veterinarian [Section 3.131(b)]
Perimeter Fence for Outdoor Housing	Not specified under the AWR	8 feet high and 3 feet from enclosures unless variance approved [Section 3.127(d)]

For More Information

You can view the full text of the Animal Welfare Act and the AWR in the United States Code, Title 7, Chapter 54, Sections 2131-2159 and the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 9, Chapter 1, Subchapter A, Parts 1-4.

If you have questions, contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal Care staff at (970) 494-7478 or animalcare@usda.gov.