

Ensuring Pets are Medically Fit for Air Travel

By Nelva J. Bryant, DVM, MPH



Pets are exposed to the same environmental and physiological stressors and may have similar disease conditions that require fitness to fly and medical clearances in human medicine. To help advise physicians, the Aerospace Medical Association developed “Medical Considerations for Airline Travel” (AsMA/Aerospace Medical Association). Fitness to fly and medical clearances are described for conditions, such as: anemia; cardiovascular diseases; diabetes, pulmonary diseases, pregnancy; and diarrhea.

Determining whether a pet is medically fit for air travel is not routinely done by veterinarians and we don't have an association to advise us in this regard.

As USDA-accredited veterinarians, we often complete health certificates (HC) or international health certificates (IHC) for pets traveling via air. The HC or IHC gathers information regarding the transport of the pet. It serves to identify the type of animal, provide a record of its vaccination, treatment, and testing histories required by the destination, and certifies the animal has no evidence of diseases infectious/contagious to animals or people. **It does not assess whether a pet is medically fit for air travel.**

Due to their names, pet owners assume that the issued HC or IHC certifies that their pet is healthy. This misconception can jeopardize the health, safety, and well-being of pets during air travel.

To ensure pets are medically fit for air travel, I suggest the following:

Educate pet owners to ensure they know the purpose of the HC and IHC. Both certify that the animal was examined, meets the requirements of the destination, and appears to be free of any infectious/contagious disease transmissible to animals or people.

Assess whether a pet is medically fit to fly. While completing a HC or IHC for a pet traveling via air, review the pets' medical records. If a pet has a pre-existing medical condition, such as: cardiovascular disease, pulmonary disease, diabetes, anxiety, pregnancy, etc., advise further diagnostic tests to assess the pets' health.

Remember to record your medical assessment in the pets' medical records. Depending upon the case, air travel may not be in the best interest for the pets' safety and well-being. If you don't advise air travel for a pet, realize the decision for travel is at the pet owners' discretion. **You may be asked to issue the HC or IHC against your recommendations. Whether you do or not, it is at your discretion as well.**



If you have further questions, please contact Dr. Nelva J. Bryant, Airline Industry Veterinarian and Pet-Centric Travel Expert at: drbryant@whenpets.com

Dr. Bryant developed "When Pets Fly" to share pet-centric travel education. Learn more by visiting her website at: www.WhenPets.com



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Dr. Nelva Bryant has a unique veterinary career. As a retired LCDR in the US Public Health Service, she held various positions in the US Federal Government (USDA, FDA, and CDC), where she was able to benefit animal and public health. Currently working in the airline industry, her mission is to improve pet travel via promoting animal welfare, education, and veterinary oversight.

Education: Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine-1993; University of Iowa-MPH for Practicing Veterinarians Program-2013
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