



**Humane
World for
Animals™**

Formerly called the Humane Society of the
United States and Humane Society International

Fact Sheet: Puppy Mills and Pet Stores

Most Americans have pets.

More than 60 percent of households in the United States own a pet. More than 88% of households that own dogs consider their dogs “members of my family.”ⁱ Less than 30 percent of pets in homes come from shelters and rescues.

Pet store puppies come from puppy mills.

Responsible breeders do not sell their puppies to pet stores because they want to meet their puppy buyers in person—and a majority of national breed clubs’ Codes of Ethics prohibit or discourage their members from selling their dogs to pet stores. The suppliers of pet store puppies are largely “puppy mills,” commercial facilities that mass-produce puppies for sale without adequate attention to their physical, behavioral, or psychological needs. Humane World for Animals conducted numerous hidden-camera investigations proving that many of the breeding facilities that supply pet stores are mills.



A USDA licensed breeder who can legally sell to pet stores. Photo by Humane World for Animals.

Puppies sold in pet stores come from all over the country—and many come from breeders with one or more Animal Welfare Act violations.

Some breeders found selling to pet stores have a record of repeat violations of the federal Animal Welfare Act. USDA inspection reports reveal breeders with sick and injured dogs who had not been treated by a vet, underweight dogs with their ribs, hips and spines protruding, puppies with their feet falling through the wire floors, puppies with severe deformities or even missing limbs, dogs standing in piles of feces, and food contaminated by mold and insects.

Pet stores often do not disclose the origin of the puppies they sell.

Most pet stores do not disclose the true origins of their puppies, instead using deceptive sales pitches about “USDA licensed” or “professional” breeders. Unfortunately, the federal Animal Welfare Act prescribes survival standards for dogs, not humane care standards. The USDA has repeatedly asserted that their regulations and standards are minimum requirements.ⁱⁱ Indeed, the agency’s own Animal Welfare Act Fact Sheet states “Although Federal requirements establish basic standards, regulated businesses are encouraged to exceed the specified minimum standards.”

The pipeline of puppy sales to pet stores exposes puppies to stress and disease

As they are shipped to pet stores, very young puppies typically spend days in cramped cages on a truck, exposed to puppies from a variety of other sources, some of whom may be sick. During this time, their immune systems are not fully developed and they can be exposed to a range of diseases. In addition, puppies have died due to overheating on unattended transport vehicles and other dangerous incidents on the road.



A puppy for sale in a pet store. Photo by Humane World for Animals.

Puppies sold at pet stores often have serious health or psychological problems.

Some of the illnesses common to pet store puppies include zoonotic diseases which can be spread to other pets and humans. Buyers are often faced with enormous vet bills or even the death of the puppy within days or weeks of purchase. A puppy may seem healthy for months only to develop symptoms of serious congenital conditions much later. These health problems are often the result of unsanitary conditions, insufficient veterinary care, and poor breeding at puppy mills.

Pet stores do not have to sell puppies to be successful.

More than 3,000 pet stores nationwide have signed a pledge not to sell puppies,ⁱⁱⁱ demonstrating that it is possible to have a successful pet-related business without supporting puppy mills.

Humane World for Animals recommends never purchasing a puppy from a pet store due to the health, safety and animal welfare concerns described above. People who are seeking to add a puppy to their family are urged to visit a reputable shelter or rescue organization, or purchase only from a small, responsible breeder who will show the buyer the parent of the puppy and allow them to see where the puppy was born and raised.

A study by Shelter Animals Count found that 29% of the 2.9 million dogs entering shelters in 2024 were puppies, proving that there is no shortage of puppies available from humane sources.

For more information on getting a puppy from a humane source, see humaneworld.org/puppy.

Find out more information at humaneworld.org/pupppymills.

ⁱ AVMA Pet Ownership and Demographics Sourcebook, 2024

ⁱⁱ See 7 U.S.C. § 2143(A)(8), stating that the federal Animal Welfare Act does not preempt state laws.

ⁱⁱⁱ Humane World for Animals Puppy Friendly Pet Stores program, 2023.