

Air Cargo

Insider Preparation Guide

Cargo travel runs on rules, timing windows, and crate requirements—so the most important prep happens before drop-off. When you prepare early and build calm crate time, you reduce the chance of last-minute delays and help your pet handle travel day with less stress.

This guide focuses on the key prep steps that make cargo travel smoother—crate readiness, documentation, and travel-day essentials.

For educational purposes only. Cargo requirements can vary by airline, cargo facility, temperature restrictions, crate rules, and seasonal policies.

Quick Pack List

Identification & Documentation:

- Secure collar/harness + ID tag
- Microchip number + registry (if known)
- Health Certificate (CVI), if required
- Vaccination records, if required
- Cargo booking / airway bill info (if provided)
- Pet Profile sheet + one clear recent photo (saved on phone)

Your Pet Profile

- Full name, age, species, breed, weight
- Temperament notes (timid/reactive)
- Handling notes (touch-sensitive, door-darter, shy with strangers)
- Leash behavior (pulls, freezes, reactive, calm)
- Potty cues or habits
- Any medical considerations or mobility limits
- Emergency contact (if different from booking contact)

Personal Items:

- IATA-compliant hard-sided crate (correct size + required hardware)
- Water dish attached inside crate door (test for stability)
- Absorbent crate liner (no loose bedding or straw)
- Zip ties/fasteners (only if required at check-in)
- One small comfort item (thin towel/blanket with home scent)
- Pre-portioned meals for arrival + 1 extra day (labeled)
- Any prescribed meds (original bottle + written schedule)
- Printed contact card taped in a clear sleeve (if allowed by airline/cargo facility)

7-10 days before travel

Crate Compliance + Setup (Cargo)

Cargo is rule-driven - correct crate setup prevents check-in problems.

- Confirm crate size: stand comfortably + turn around (dogs) / full stretch + turn (cats)
- Use metal hardware (bolts/nuts) and secure the door latch
- Attach water dish inside the door (test for spills)
- Label crate per policy (pet name, destination, contacts — matching documents)

Insider tip: Do a 'crate audit' with photos (latch, hardware, labels) before drop-off to catch issues early.

Crate Familiarity (High-Value Reps)

Cargo crates feel different - repetition builds calm, even for confident pets.

- Feed meals in the crate (door open first)
- Close the door for short calm reps and build slowly
- Practice brief 'step away' reps (10–30 sec) — return calmly
- Add a short 'crate + car' session once your pet can rest quietly

Insider tip: Only open the door during quiet moments - this teaches 'calm gets release.'

Paperwork + Documentation

Cargo check-in has deadlines - missing paperwork can delay or cancel travel.

- Confirm whether a Health Certificate (CVI) is required
- Confirm the valid date window (if required)
- Verify pet name + destination details match across documents
- Confirm receiver pickup plan + backup number (best phone numbers)
- Keep printed documents together + save photo backups on your phone
- Have receiver contact details printed and included

Insider tip: Place a copy of key contacts in a clear waterproof sleeve attached to the crate (if allowed).

Noise + Motion Acclimation

Cargo environments include loud carts, forklifts, rolling sounds, and echoing spaces.

- Play low-volume cargo/warehouse sounds during meals/rest
- Increase slowly over several days
- Do calm car time (parked first), then short quiet drives
- End sessions before stress builds

Insider tip: Pair loud sounds with food/rest - your pet learns noise predicts calm, not chaos.

48-72 hours before travel

Grooming + Comfort

Clean, dry coats and trimmed nails help your pet rest better in a crate.

- Light bath 2-3 days before travel (not same-day)
- Brush out mats/tangles (mats can cause constant discomfort)
- Trim nails to prevent snagging and slipping
- For cats: trim nails and brush to reduce shedding/stress

Insider tip: Avoid a bath right before drop-off—damp coats can increase chill and discomfort.

Prep Food + Meds Like a Professional

Keep food predictable and instructions short - long notes get skipped under time pressure.

- Stick to normal food (avoid new treats/toppers/chews)
- Follow any cargo check-in guidance for food/ water timing
- If meds are essential, confirm the plan in writing before travel day
- Prepare a small 'delay buffer' portion (if allowed)

Insider tip: Write a one-line feeding note (what + when)—clear beats detailed when things move fast.

Health Check

Cargo has strict health rules for a reason: it protects your pet and other animals. If your pet is showing signs of illness, cargo travel may not be safe or allowed—catching changes early prevents a risky travel day.

- Notify your transport provider ASAP for vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, coughing/ sneezing, discharge
- Share vet instructions ahead of time (dose, timing, with/without food)
- Do not introduce new meds/supplements in the final 72 hours without vet guidance
- If your pet is heat/cold sensitive, note it clearly on the profile

Insider tip: Practice drinking from the travel water dish 1–2 times before drop-off. Pets that won't drink from unfamiliar gear can dehydrate faster.

Light Activity, Not Overstimulation

Keep routines normal so your pet rests well before crating.

- Normal walk and sniff time is ideal
- Avoid intense exercise or stressful outings
- Keep the day before travel low-key

Insider tip: A calm sniff walk is ideal - it lowers arousal and supports better crate rest.

Day of drop-off

Set your pet up for a calm drop-off

Cargo drop-offs are busy—calm routines keep your pet regulated.

- Potty break before leaving for drop-off
- Keep the environment quiet (no crowd/no hype)
- Avoid heavy meals right before travel (lighter earlier is often better)
- Avoid sedation unless vet-directed and pre-discussed

Insider tip: Plan to arrive 30–45 minutes before the cargo check-in cutoff time (not the flight time). That buffer covers lines, paperwork checks, and crate questions without rushing your pet.

Do a Quick ID + Safety Check

A final check prevents crate failures and paperwork confusion.

- Crate hardware tightened + door latch secure
- Labels correct per policy (pet name, destination, contacts)
- Water dish attached and filled per plan
- Share one clear recent photo for quick ID confirmation

Insider tip: Take a clear photo of the crate (labels + latch) at drop-off—proof of setup if questions come up.