

FACT SHEET: Pets in the United States

Animal Shelters:

There are about 13,600 independent, non-profit community animal shelters nationwide, but there is no national organization monitoring these shelters. For example, the terms "Humane Society" and "SPCA" are generic—shelters that are not part of the Humane Society of the U.S. or the ASPCA. Currently, no government institution or animal organization is officially responsible for tabulating national statistics for the animal protection movement. These are national estimates, and the figures may vary from state to state.

- Approximately 7.6 million companion animals enter shelters nationwide every year. Of those, approximately 3.9 million are dogs and 3.4 million are cats.
- Each year, about 2.7 million animals are euthanized (1.2 million dogs and 1.4 million cats).
- Roughly 2.7 million shelter animals are adopted each year (1.4 million dogs and 1.3 million cats).
- Approximately 649,000 animals who enter shelters as strays are returned to their owners. Of those, 542,000 are dogs and only 100,000 are cats.
- Of the dogs entering shelters, about 35% are adopted, 31% are euthanized, and 26% are returned to their owners.
- Of the cats entering shelters, approximately 37% are adopted, 41% are euthanized, and less than 5% are returned to their owners.
- Almost twice as many animals go into shelters as strays than those that are relinquished by their owners.

Pet Ownership:

- According to the American Pet Products Association (APPA), 70-80 million dogs and 74-96 million cats are owned in this country. 37-47% of all households have a dog, and 30-37% have a cat.
- According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), about 40% of people found their pets by word of mouth.
- Most pets are obtained from acquaintances and family members. 28% of dogs are purchased from breeders, and 29% of cats and dogs are adopted from shelters and rescues.
- APPA says that more than 35% of cats are acquired as strays.
- According to the American Humane Association, the most common reasons why people

give up their dogs is because their place of residence does not allow pets (29%), not enough time, divorce/death, and behavior issues (10% each). For cats, the most common reasons are that they were not allowed in the residence (21%) and allergies (11%).

Pet Overpopulation:

- It is impossible to determine how many stray dogs and cats live in this country. Estimates for cats alone range up to 70 million.
- The average number of litters a fertile cat produces is 1-2 per year with 4-6 kittens per litter.
- The average number of litters a fertile dog produces is 1 per year with 4-6 puppies.
- Domestic cats and dogs with owners generally live longer, healthier lives than strays.
- Many strays are pets that went outdoors without collars and ID tags (or other identifiers such as microchips or ear tattoos).
- Only 10% of the animals received by shelters are found to be spayed or neutered, while 83% of dogs and 91% of cats with owners are spayed or neutered.
- Spaying or neutering 1 pet costs less than raising a litter of puppies or kittens for 1 year.

ASPCA estimates that 1 female cat can produce 420,000 kittens! Broken down:

An average cat has 1-8 kittens per litter and 2-3 litters per year. During her productive life, 1 female cat could have more than 100 kittens. A single pair of cats and their kittens can produce as many as 420,000 kittens in just 7 years!

Not convinced yet? These are the top 10 reasons to spay or neuter your pet:

1. Your female pet will live a longer, healthier life. Spaying helps prevent uterine infections and breast cancer, which are fatal in about 50% of dogs and 90% of cats. Spaying your pet before her first heat offers the best protection from these diseases.
2. Besides preventing unwanted litters, neutering your male companion prevents testicular cancer, if done before six months of age.
3. Your spayed female won't go into heat. While cycles can vary, female cats usually go into heat 4-5 days every 3 weeks during breeding season. In an effort to advertise for mates, they'll yowl and urinate more frequently—sometimes all over the house!
4. Your male pet won't want to roam away from home. For example, an intact male dog will do

just about anything to find a mate! This includes digging his way under the fence and making like Houdini to escape. Once free, he risks injury in traffic and fights with other males.

5. Your neutered male cat or dog will be much better behaved, focusing more attention on his human family. In contrast, unneutered dogs and cats can be aggressive and may mark their territory by spraying strong-smelling urine all over the house.

6. Spaying or neutering will NOT make your pet fat. Don't use that old excuse! Your pets will remain fit and trim as long as you provide sufficient exercise and monitor their food intake.

7. It is highly cost-effective. It also beats the vet bill you'll run up after your unneutered or in-heat pet escapes and gets into a fight with a local stray!

8. It is good for the community. Stray animals pose a real problem by preying on local wildlife, causing car accidents, marking their territories (e.g., in your garden, on your car's wheels), and scaring or attacking you, your children, or your pets. More spaying and neutering means less feral dogs and cats.

9. Your pet doesn't need to have a litter for your children to learn about the miracle of birth. There are tons of books and videos available for that purpose. Bringing baby animals into the world that you have no intention of keeping is irresponsible—especially when so many unwanted pets end up in shelters.

10. Spaying and neutering helps fight pet overpopulation. Every year, millions of cats and dogs of all ages and breeds are euthanized or suffer a life of homelessness, which is totally preventable.

This information has been brought to you by Hearts4Paws, a non-profit, no-kill volunteer animal shelter organization.



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