

Leaving a dog that needs medication can feel like handing over a delicate manuscript to a stranger and hoping they read it exactly as you would. A clear boarding schedule reduces mistakes, eases the staff's workflow, preserves your dog's routine, and lowers the chance of missed doses. This article walks through how to create a practical, humane, and professional boarding plan for dogs on medication, including what to pack, how to choose a facility, pricing considerations, and special cases such as holiday boarding and long term boarding.

Why clarity matters When a dog is in an unfamiliar place, small changes can magnify stress and affect appetite, elimination, and behavior. Medication timing interacts with meals, exercise, and sleep. A sedative given too late may blunt evening activity; an anticonvulsant missed for a single dose can trigger seizures. In my years working with boarding facilities and veterinary clinics, the most common errors are ambiguous instructions and mismatched expectations between owners and staff. A personalized schedule is not paperwork redundancy. It is risk reduction and quality of care.

Start with the medication map Begin by writing a medication map: a single-page document that lists each drug, the exact dose, the route (oral, topical, injection), the frequency and the acceptable window for administration. Keep it brief and precise. For example, instead of saying "twice daily," write "morning dose between 7:00 and 9:00, evening dose between 19:00 and 21:00." If a pill should be given with food, note the acceptable delay after feeding. If a medication is time-sensitive, note the maximum allowable deviation in hours.

A medication map reduces decision fatigue for staff and helps them prioritize during busy shifts. When facilities have five or ten dogs on medication, a one-line ambiguity rapidly compounds. Clear windows keep everyone aligned.

What to include on the paperwork Beyond the medication map, some elements are easy to forget but important for safety and continuity of care. Include your veterinarian's contact information and permission for the boarding facility to reach them for clarification or emergency treatment. Sign and date any authorization forms. If your dog has had recent bloodwork, attach the relevant results or note if monitoring is required. List known drug allergies, previous adverse reactions, and whether you authorize emergency medications or hospitalization if needed.

Checklist: essential items to provide with a medicated dog

- Medication map with doses, routes, and acceptable administration windows
- Labeled medication in original containers and any syringes or applicators needed
- Signed authorization for veterinary care and contact details for your vet and an emergency clinic
- Clear notes on behavior changes to watch for and baseline normal signs (appetite, bowels, sleep)
- Feeding instructions tied to medication timing, including allowed treats and withholding rules

Designing the daily schedule Tailor the schedule to your dog's existing routine when possible. Dogs thrive on predictability. If your dog normally receives a medication at 8:00 and 20:00 at home, the boarding schedule should mirror that within the facility's constraints. Many facilities staff shifts change mid-morning and late evening, so align time-sensitive meds to staff coverage. For example, if a facility typically performs med rounds at 08:00, 12:00, 17:00, and 21:00, work with them to place doses within those windows. Define an "acceptable window" of one hour for noncritical meds and 30 minutes or less for critical meds, unless the vet indicates otherwise.

Use concrete examples to avoid ambiguity. For a twice-daily anti-inflammatory that is best given with food, specify: "Give 8:00 plus morning meal within 15 minutes; second dose 20:00 plus evening meal within 15 minutes. If dog refuses food, hold medication and notify owner first. If owner cannot be reached within 30 minutes, give medication with water and record refusal."

Handling complex regimens Some dogs take multiple medications with interactions or require titration. For instance, a dog on phenobarbital requires steady dosing and may need blood concentration checks. If monitoring is required, list the date of the last lab work, the therapeutic range, and whether to call the vet for doses outside the range. For dogs receiving injectable medications, note who will administer injections. Some facilities will train their staff or require a licensed technician or vet to perform injections. Others will arrange for a mobile vet to come in for injections; that adds cost and scheduling complexity.

For controlled substances such as tramadol or certain sedatives, facilities often have strict protocols. Provide documentation proving prescription origin and include an authorization signature for the facility to store and dispense such medications. Expect facilities to require original, labeled bottles. If you bring loose pills in a baggie, they may refuse them.

Packaging and labeling Keep medications [Hip Hounds Round Rock](#) in their original pharmacy-labeled containers whenever possible. If you de-blisters pills into a daily pill planner for convenience, also bring the original bottle and place the pill planner inside a labeled zip-top bag with instructions. Clearly label every container with dog's full name, your name and phone number, medication name, dose per administration, and route. Use waterproof labels if you can; kennels get wet and labels smudge.

Boarding packing guide

- Original labeled medication containers, plus a labeled pill dispenser if used
- An extra two to three days of medication beyond the planned stay, in case of travel delays or medical needs
- Familiar food, measured and labeled portions, with feeding instructions tied to medication timing
- Comfort items that reduce stress and support eating: a favorite blanket, unstuffed toy, or a carrier-smelling towel
- Emergency contact sheet including alternate human contacts, your vet, and the authorized emergency clinic

What to pack beyond medication Bring the food your dog eats at home, ideally pre-measured into single-serve bags or labeled containers for each day. Sudden diet changes can precipitate vomiting or diarrhea, which may interfere with oral meds and increase the need for vet visits. If your dog eats only at certain times, write those on the medication map. Bring any supplements that are necessary to preserve balance during boarding, and note whether they can be skipped in case of reduced appetite.

Comfort items matter more than you might expect. A towel that smells like home or a worn T-shirt of yours can reduce stress-related anorexia. That increases the likelihood a dog will accept food and medication on schedule.

Choosing the right facility Facility selection is a major variable. Some kennels offer med-only services; some boarding facilities have on-site veterinary staff; others rely on a vet on call. Prioritize facilities that have established protocols for handling medications, including secure storage, trained staff, and documentation practices. Ask about med rounds, staff-to-dog ratios during those rounds, and how they record doses (paper chart, electronic record, or kennel management software).

Visit in person. Observe the med administration process if you can. Ask for references from other owners with medicated dogs. Facilities that board dogs long term or during holidays tend to be busiest at peak times, so ask how they staff during holidays and whether additional fees or restrictions apply.

Holiday boarding and long term boarding nuances Holiday boarding introduces two stressors: increased facility occupancy and staff working under holiday schedules. Ask how med rounds change on holidays. Some facilities consolidate med rounds or change shift times, which can widen administration windows. For time-sensitive medications, you may need to arrange for an extra staff member or choose a facility that provides veterinary oversight on holidays.

Long term boarding carries different challenges. Over weeks or months, subtle changes in appetite, body weight, or behavior can indicate medication side effects requiring dose adjustments. Facilities that host long term boarding should have processes for periodic reassessment and for communicating lab monitoring needs to your vet. Expect higher oversight and possibly higher pricing because of the added workload.

Pricing and trade-offs Medication handling changes pricing. Facilities often charge a flat med administration fee per stay or per day, plus the cost of any injections performed by a licensed clinician. Holiday boarding may carry premium rates, and long term boarding often has a discounted daily rate after a threshold number of days, but medication fees may be assessed daily regardless of discounts. Ask for a clear price sheet that lists medication administration fees, veterinary exam and treatment fees, emergency hospital transfer fees, and holiday or weekend surcharges.

Weigh trade-offs between cost and risk. Lower-cost facilities may still do a fine job, but they may have fewer staff on holidays, less veterinary backup, or less rigorous documentation. Higher-cost facilities may offer on-site vets, electronic medical records, and better staff ratios. For a dog on critical medication, paying for higher oversight is usually worth the peace of mind.

Record keeping and handoff When you drop off your dog, walk through the medication map with the staff. Point out anything that may not be obvious from the paperwork, such as subtle ways your dog indicates nausea or the noise that startles them. Ask the staff to demonstrate where they will store medications and how they will record each dose. A good facility will show you the log and explain how they handle missed doses, adverse events, and owner notification.

Request daily updates. For short stays, a single message on pick-up may suffice, but for long term boarding or high-risk medications, ask for daily notes, photos, or a quick call. Clarify who will be your point of contact at the facility and what times they will call if there is a problem.

Troubleshooting common issues Refusal to take medication is common. Staff are surprisingly creative at this point, using pill pockets, crushed pills mixed into small amounts of strong-smelling food, or hand-feeding. Some medications cannot be crushed or should not be given with certain foods. Indicate on the map whether crushing is allowed. If a dog consistently refuses oral meds, discuss injectable alternatives with your vet ahead of the boarding date.

Missed doses due to vomiting present a judgment call. If a dog vomits within 15 minutes of an oral dose, many vets recommend repeating the dose. If vomiting persists, the on-site staff should contact you and your vet. Establish ahead of time whether you want them to try one repeat dose, hold dosing and call you, or transfer to emergency care immediately.

Edge cases and special needs Dogs on insulin require feeding and dosing with precise timing. Insulin dosing should be handled only by trained staff and ideally under veterinary supervision. If your dog requires frequent glucose monitoring, confirm that the facility has the right equipment and trained personnel.

Dogs on seizure medications rarely tolerate wide deviations. In these cases, choose a facility with veterinary oversight or consider a nurse-managed boarding option. For dogs on controlled psychiatric medications—such as certain benzodiazepines or trazodone—document the drug schedule and be ready to provide behavioral notes because sedation levels may change in a new environment.

Final pickup and follow-through At pickup, review the medication log. Compare what was given to what you provided. Obtain copies of any records and any notes about behavior, appetite, or adverse events. If a dose was missed or an alternative medication administered, confirm the reason and whether follow-up with your vet is needed. If the facility administered any additional medications, request written documentation of name, dose, and time.

After a stay, watch your dog closely for 48 to 72 hours. Stress-related changes can manifest after the return home. If you notice changes in appetite, elimination, or behavior that could relate to medication, contact your vet. Keep an eye on remaining medication supply and refill prescriptions promptly to avoid gaps between stays.

Practical templates and next steps Create a folder for boarding that contains printed medication maps, a labeled bag with meds, a boarding packing checklist, signed authorizations, and a copy of recent vet notes. Keep a digital copy on your phone for emergencies. If your dog boards frequently, create a standard form that you can reuse and update rather than rewriting from scratch each time.

Making the schedule work requires communication and realism. Expect some small hiccups, and plan for contingencies. Choose a facility with transparent practices, and invest the time to train the staff on your dog's quirks. The upfront effort keeps your dog safer and makes your absence less stressful for everyone involved.

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