

Bringing your Dog to a Pet Expo? Think Twice

As the weather gets warmer, more and more pet expos are popping up across the country. Many pet expos feature a “Pets Welcome” message, encouraging owners to bring their dogs with them to the event. However it is important to remember that pet expos are geared toward pet owners more than dogs, and so it can become a very high stress environment.

“Narrow alleyways, lots of people and children, flags flapping, exhibitors with strange (or yummy) smelling displays and unfamiliar dogs can cause even the most calm and socialized dog to feel anxious,” explains Stacey Huneke, a Registered Veterinary Technician. “Dogs react differently to stress and anxiety. Some may vomit or have diarrhea, and often the person [holding] the leash doesn’t even know it happened since they are focused on a conversation with an exhibitor.”

While some pet expos have introduced “activities” to get dogs in on the fun, they often involve running a course that most dogs are not accustomed to, nor are they fit enough to perform. Huneke says this can lead to injury or overheating.

“It’s also important to remember that event organizers cannot guarantee the vaccination status of every pet brought to the pet expo,” Huneke adds. “A high stress environment mixed with disease could mean that your pet gets sick, too.”

While Huneke generally does not recommend bringing your pet to a public pet expo, if you do, then she says it is a good idea to learn basic dog body language so you can read the signs your dog is giving you when he or she is stressed. Talk to your veterinary healthcare team to learn about basic dog body language – particularly the stress signals that dogs most commonly display.

Some other tips to consider if you are bringing your pet to an expo:

- Be mentally prepared to walk out of the event if your pet, or pets around you, are acting stressed
- Make sure your dog is spayed or neutered, and up-to-date on all vaccines including Bordetella
- Always keep one eye on your dog while you are talking with exhibitors or other attendees
- Make sure children do not pet your dog without asking your permission, and only allow it if your dog is calm, sitting and not exhibiting stress signals
- Look up in advance where the nearest emergency veterinary clinic is, and locate the First Aid tent once you are on site

Contact:

Colleen McElwain
Canadian Animal Health Institute
(519) 763-7777

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