

Policy: Boarding Female Dogs In-Season

Guide Dogs for the Blind has adapted the following new policy for the boarding of female puppies in season. This policy will govern all puppies placed on or after February 15, 2003:

Raisers who choose to raise unspayed female puppies have the following options for housing in-season female puppies:

- At home
- In the home of an approved puppy sitter
- At a commercial kennel at raiser expense
- At Guide Dogs for the Blind's San Rafael or Topanga kennels. Both the San Rafael and Topanga kennels have capacity limits by population. If the kennels are at capacity for the boarding of in-season female dogs, raisers will be required to choose one of the other three approved options.

Homes (raiser or puppy sitter) will be required to follow certain guidelines while the dog is in-season, including:

- Female canine seasons (proestrus and estrus) generally run for approximately 21 days, but individual dogs may stay in-season for longer periods (see "Education" below). It is during this period when females attract male dogs and enter their fertile period. The following guidelines are effective from the first through the 28th day of a dog's season or longer as required. Only the club leader may release a dog from the management of these guidelines after a consultation between the raiser and leader to insure that the dog is out-of-season.
- The raiser's leader must approve participating homes.
- Yard and home security should be of the highest standard. Marginally safe fencing and doors or young children who could possibly leave doors and gates open may disqualify a home.
- No unaltered or recently altered (within the past six weeks) male dogs may live in the home.
- The close proximity of neighboring or loose unaltered dogs may disqualify a home.
- Participating raisers must be capable dog handlers.
- Participating raisers must have a demonstrated willingness and ability to follow all guidelines.
- All participating raisers and family members must be trained by their leaders prior to boarding a female dog in-season.
- No outings outside of the home or yard are allowed.
- No interaction with unaltered male dogs is allowed.
- While in the house and not under direct supervision of a raiser or GDB trained family member, a dog must be confined to a crate.
- Dogs may not be left in a yard, pen or kennel without direct supervision by a raiser or GDB trained family member. Male dogs can be attracted to the scent of an estrus female dog from long distances and can be extremely determined to enter even well confined areas, thus, the need for direct supervision.
- Any dog that becomes lost, loose, or otherwise unsupervised must be reported immediately to the raiser's advisor or the Puppy Raising Department office regardless of the time period that the dog has been unsupervised.
- Any in-season female dog that comes in any contact with an unaltered male dog must be reported immediately to the raiser's advisor or the Puppy Raising Department office.

Please note that Guide Dogs had previously reimbursed raisers \$100 towards the cost of a crate to encourage voluntary participation in the in-home boarding of females in season. This practice is now discontinued. We encourage all leaders with the support of their advisors to develop protocols for individual raisers and their dogs, promoting the program and safety simultaneously.

Education: Boarding Female Dogs In-Season

Leaders, please provide the following basic, layperson's information to your club in introducing this trial program and in educating participating raisers in monitoring the seasons of the dogs that they raise.

The reproductive cycle of ovulation in dogs is identified as being "in-season" or "in-heat." During this period female dogs ovulate, generating eggs. In-season dogs are capable of being bred by male dogs, fertilizing the eggs and producing puppies. Spayed dogs do not come into season.

The foremost rule to always remember is that exceptions to timing, patterns, and identifying markers are frequent within individual dogs and between dogs. Raisers and leaders should always be vigilant in watching for signs of the dogs that they raise coming into, remaining, or perhaps re-entering seasons (see below).

Generally, dogs come into season every six months beginning some time after six months of age. Dogs, though, may come into season as early as 4 months of age or as late as a year or more. Cycles may run like clockwork every six months or they may happen more or less frequently. Dogs may even start a season, appear to go out-of-season, and start immediately again. This pattern is often referred to as a "split season." One can see the need for raisers and leaders to continually monitor dogs and not to trust any pattern to apply to individual dogs. Failing to properly identify the cycle of an individual dog may lead to an accidental breeding.

A standard season runs for approximately 21 days. The season may be preceded by a slight swelling of the dog's vulva. The season begins with a bright or dark red discharge from the dog's vulva. The discharge initially may be no more than a drop. Many females keep themselves very clean, and there may be no visible blood around the vulvar area. As the season progresses through the first week or so, the discharge generally increases and then decreases in volume and color. The vulva can be very enlarged and turgid during the first week, and then begins to soften. Some dogs may have a very heavy discharge and swelling; others may show lesser signs. Again, diligence in monitoring all dogs as individuals is required.

After being in-season for approximately seven to ten days, the amount and color of the discharge will lighten. The swelling will also lessen. In some dogs the reduction of swelling and discharge may be so significant that the dog appears to be out of season. This is not the case. The dog is actually entering her most fertile period when a male can inseminate her! Extra caution is needed. It is also important to note that sperm can be viable and capable of impregnating an estrus female dog for as long as 7 days following a single mating. Therefore, one inattentive moment can lead to an unwanted pregnancy.

As the days pass and the swelling and discharge continue to lighten, the dog is still breedable. Some dogs are capable of conceiving beyond the twentieth day of season. Raisers must continually be cautious, following our guidelines for at least 28 days, and not lessening the required supervision until released by their leader.

Sometimes a female may go through what is known as a "silent heat." This is when the usual physical signs of the heat cycle, the swelling and the bleeding, are not present. You may still see behavioral changes, including an increased interest from or with other dogs.

Other behavioral indicators may or may not be present. During and in the time surrounding a dog's season, there may be a change in overall activity levels, with the female becoming much more active and "busy." The change in behaviors may include flagging (raising the tail), play bowing or tipping forward, increased barking or whining, inability to settle or relax, and becoming more destructive. There may be an increase in level of thirst or appetite, and a change in elimination habits. The female may seem nervous or more high-strung. These behavioral changes can begin to occur up to three or four weeks before the physical signs of the heat cycle. More commonly, they occur in the week before the physical signs begin. In some females, there may be no noticeable change in behaviors at all. In others, just one or two of those listed. Also, behavioral changes do not always indicate the onset of the heat cycle. At the beginning of her cycle, the female may become less tolerant of other dogs approaching or sniffing her. She may lift her lip, growl, hackle, or even snap at the other dog. Instead of wagging her tail when other dogs sniff her rear, she may tuck it tightly straight down against her body. This does not mean she is becoming aggressive. It is a normal behavioral change. She will be her friendly self once again when her cycle is over. If you suspect a silent heat cycle, notify your advisor through your leader.

Occasionally, towards the end of the heat cycle or in the weeks following it, the increase in hormone levels may cause the mammary glands to become active and to produce milk. Some people call this a "false pregnancy." This is not considered abnormal; but again, please notify your advisor through your leader.

Any sign of recurring discharge or swelling requires additional management by the prescribed guidelines and must be reported immediately to the club leader who will speak to your advisor.

Again, please always remember that exceptions to any patterns are frequent and that all dogs must be managed individually and with caution.

A leader who is uncertain of a dog's reproductive cycle should consult with his/her advisor, who may recommend a veterinary consult with the GDB veterinary clinic.

Any female in-season dogs that come into contact with an unaltered male dog or become loose, lost, or otherwise unsupervised must be reported immediately to the advisor or the Puppy Raising Department office if the advisor is unavailable.

We believe that this program presents an excellent opportunity for raisers to maintain the training and bond, which they devote to the puppies that they raise. We also respect raisers' abilities to safely house puppies in all instances. This program is representative of that trust. We appreciate the extra efforts of those who decide to undertake these additional responsibilities.