

Frequently Asked Questions: Dogs in Outdoor Dining Areas/Patios:

Q: Are pets allowed on the premises of a food establishment?

A: The short answer is no.

Washoe County Health District Regulations prohibits animals, other than service animals and security/police dogs, from the premises of a Food Establishment. The “premises” is defined as the physical facility, its contents and the contiguous land or property under the control of the permit holder. Taken together, animals (other than service animals and security/police dogs) are prohibited in both the indoor and outdoor areas of a restaurant.

A New Rule in 2015:

The Environmental Health Services Division received authority from the District Board of Health that allows the Division to issue Waivers. A Waiver is a written agreement between the Division and a permit holder that authorizes a modification of the Regulations, if in the opinion of the Division, a health hazard or nuisance will not result from the modification. Staff may require documents to support a Waiver, which may include operational plans, challenge studies, monitoring logs, etc.

Q: Will all restaurants allow dogs?

A: Retail food establishment may choose not to allow pet dogs.

Q: Where in a restaurant may pet dogs go?

A: The Waiver allows retail food establishments to permit dogs only in designated outdoor dining space, such as a patio, with its own exterior entrance. Pet dogs are not allowed inside, and may not sit or stand on chairs or other furniture.

Q: Can I bring other pets besides dogs?

A: No. The Waiver only applies to dogs, which must be leashed or confined in a pet carrier while dining.

Q: Can the server pet or play with my dog?

A: No. Employees of retail food establishments are prohibited from petting or otherwise having contact with dogs while on duty, and must immediately wash hands if contact occurs.

Q: Can I share plates or utensils with my pet dogs?

A: No. It is the responsibility of the food establishment to ensure that dogs only eat or drink from single-use, disposable containers provided by the establishment and/or separate dishes or utensils not intended for patrons. Dogs are not allowed to come in contact with reusable food service dishes or utensils intended for patrons.

Q: Who is responsible for cleaning up after a pet dog in an outdoor dining area?

A: The establishment is ultimately responsible for ensuring that all of its dining areas are clean and safe for the public. The Waiver requires that any dog excrement or other bodily fluids left in the dining area must be cleaned up promptly, and any contaminated surfaces sanitized.

Q: Who is responsible if a dog misbehaves, barks or is not properly controlled?

A: Washoe County, Environmental Health Services does not regulate the conduct of pets or their owners. Maintaining a dining environment free from fighting, biting or crashing furniture is the responsibility of individual businesses, customers, and potentially local law enforcement.

Q: Why are there so many rules about dogs at restaurants?

A: Even clean, well-groomed and well-behaved animals can contaminate food or drink. Tiny traces of dog waste or bodily fluids can contain germs that make people or other dogs sick. So can fur and pet dander (dead skin), which can also cause allergic reactions in some people.

Q: Is it safe to eat at a restaurant that allows dogs?

A: A restaurant that complies with state and local law is considered “safe” from an environmental health standpoint.

Q: How can dog owners help pet-friendly businesses?

A: The best way to support a local business that allows dogs, beyond making purchases, is to follow its rules. Retail food operators are ultimately responsible if customers get hurt, consume contaminated food, or violate health laws – the businesses make their rules to avoid those situations.

Common courtesy can also help to ensure a safe and pleasant experience for all customers:

- Only use the designated pet entrance and keep your dog leashed or in a pet container at all times.
- Do not tie leashes to tables. Tie a dog's leash to the owner's chair, out of the way of servers and other customers.
- NEVER bring an aggressive, nervous or untrained dog to a restaurant.
- Make sure your dog is clean and groomed, and walk your dog before dining out.
- Never let dogs eat from "people" dishes, utensils or glasses.
- Only feed and provide water to dogs from the designated dishes provided by the restaurant.
- Clean up after your dog, and promptly notify the staff if your pet has an accident.
- Be responsible for your dog's behavior – it is not enough to say "don't touch" or "keep away."

Q: How do I apply for a waiver?

A: You can find the waiver information at:

<https://www.washoecounty.us/health/programs-and-services/food-protection-services/operational-plan-requirement.php>

*** Food Establishments interested in applying for the waiver must also submit an Operation Plan. The information can be found through the same link.