

Dog day care is a service that promises exercise, socialization, and supervised company. Behind the scenes the quiet work that keeps dogs safe and healthy happens in routines: feeding systems, vaccination checks, separation strategies, and allergy management. I have managed a mid-size day care for seven years and trained staff at two others. What follows is practical guidance distilled from that hands-on experience, not theory. You will find how typical feeding procedures are run, what to expect from vaccination and health requirements, how allergies are identified and handled, and what trade-offs managers balance when protecting a group of unpredictable animals.

Why this matters Meals and snacks are one of the highest-risk daily events. A single cross-contamination, a missed medication, or an unverified vaccine can produce a bite, an emergency vet visit, or a kennel-wide illness. Clear feeding procedures and strict allergy protocols reduce those risks and preserve the trust of owners who drop their dogs off expecting a reliable, safe environment.

How day care feeding fits the daily routine A dog daycare daily routine often revolves around arrival, initial play groups, a supervised feeding window, followed by rest or enrichment. A typical dog [canine enrichment](#) daycare schedule staggers drop-off between 7:30 and 9:30 a.m., with supervised play until the first feeding block around 11:00 a.m. A second feeding or treat session may happen late afternoon for dogs who receive two meals. Staff manage feeding by splitting dogs into groups by size, temperament, feeding style, and medical needs.

Group feeding is efficient but not appropriate for every dog. Dogs who guard food, those on special diets, puppies with frequent small meals, and dogs receiving medications require individualized handling. In my facility, roughly 60 percent of dogs eat in supervised group areas; the remaining 40 percent are fed in separate suites, crates, or on a staff member's lap for pill administration.

Vaccination requirements and proof of health Most reputable dog day care facilities require proof of core vaccinations before enrollment. Core vaccines typically include rabies, a combination distemper/parvo/hepatitis shot often labeled DHPP or DAPP, and bordetella for kennel cough prevention. Many centers also require canine influenza vaccination, especially in regions that have had outbreaks.

Facilities differ on timing. A common policy is that core vaccines must be current and documented by a veterinarian, with bordetella administered at least 72 hours before first attendance when given as an injectable, or with the intranasal/oral form according to the product guidelines. Rabies intervals vary by law and vaccine type, so the day care should accept only current, vet-signed certificates.

Health screening should include recent fecal testing for parasites when appropriate, a recent negative flea and tick treatment, and a clear record of any chronic medical conditions. Some centers also require a vet wellness exam within the past 12 months. Staff should photocopy or scan vaccine records and store them against each dog's file, then routinely verify expiration dates during re-enrollment periods.

Practical feeding procedures that scale Whether a center has 12 dogs or 120, feeding procedures must be repeatable and auditable. Here are elements that make feeding both safe and efficient.

Intake documentation. Every dog's profile includes feeding times, portion sizes, preferred food, known allergies, current medications, and any feeding behaviors such as resource guarding or gulping. Profiles are updated whenever an owner makes a change, and staff initial each update.

Labelling and storage. Owners bring food in original packaging when possible, or in clearly labeled airtight containers. Labels include the dog's name, owner's last name, date, and temperature-sensitive notes if applicable. Food is stored in locked shelving or cubbies that prevent mixing. Wet foods are refrigerated by dog or family, not pooled.

Separate feeding zones. Day care facilities typically use three types of feeding zones: communal sanitized tables for calm, well-socialized dogs; individual kennels or suites for dogs needing privacy; and elevated feeding in staff-monitored rooms for puppies or dogs that gulp. Because dogs react differently to proximity, placement of a dog in a zone changes over time as staff observe behavior.

Medication and supplements. Staff trained in medication administration record the medication, dose, time given, and any reactions. Pills are given by hand, shoved in a K-9-friendly pill pocket, or hidden in small food items. Injectable medications are administered only by certified personnel or with veterinary authorization.

Cleaning between feedings. Bowls are washed in a high-heat dishwasher or sanitized with a tested detergent solution between uses, especially for dogs with allergies. Spilled kibble is swept promptly, and floors are disinfected between feeding blocks using products safe for dogs.

A short checklist owners should follow before drop-off

1. Provide food in original packaging or a labeled airtight container with the dog's name and feeding instructions.
2. List all medications and allergies on the intake form, including the brand and dosage schedule.
3. Update vaccination records and bring proof if recent shots were administered.
4. Note feeding behaviors such as resource guarding, gulping, or sensitivity to certain textures.
5. Alert staff to treats or chews you want withheld while at day care.

Managing allergies: a layered approach Dog food allergies are less common than skin sensitivities to environmental allergens, but they occur. Allergies at day care fall into three categories: true food allergies, food intolerances, and environmental or contact sensitivities. Handling each requires different steps.

Identification and documentation Owners are the first line of information. Many know whether their dog has a meat protein allergy or reacts to chicken, soy, wheat, or certain additives. Document these clearly. When owners are unsure but symptoms appear—itching, recurrent ear infections, chronic gastrointestinal upset—the facility should recommend a vet exam. Never diagnose on the floor. When a dog arrives with active symptoms, the safest course is to require a veterinary clearance before further attendance.

Segregation and control A strict no-sharing rule prevents cross-contact. That means no sharing of bowls, no sampling of other dogs' treats, and no free-for-all treat sessions. Staff separate dogs with food allergies during meal time and store allergy-safe foods apart in sealed containers. For dogs allergic to preservatives or certain proteins, staff prepare to feed owner-provided food only, and to avoid communal treats.

Labeling and cross-contamination mitigation Use single-use gloves when handling wet food for dogs with multiple allergies, prepare their meals on dedicated surfaces, and wash prep tools between uses. For dry foods, scoop with a dedicated utensil. If a dog with a severe allergy is also a social dog, position them in a low-traffic feeding zone to reduce the chance of stray kibble or treats entering their space.

Emergency preparedness Allergic reactions range from mild hives to anaphylaxis, though severe anaphylaxis from food is rare in dogs. Staff must be trained to recognize signs of swelling, vomiting, difficulty breathing, pale gums, and collapse. The facility should have an emergency plan that includes immediate veterinary contact, transportation details to the nearest emergency clinic, and a documented consent form from the owner detailing whether emergency treatment may be given.

How staff training supports allergy safety Feeding and allergy safety are only as strong as the staff who enforce them. Training modules should include vaccine verification, reading and interpreting medical records, administering oral and topical medications, recognizing signs of distress or allergies, and practicing feeding

routines. New hires should shadow experienced handlers for at least 40 hours of supervised interactions, including multiple feeding rotations. Thereafter, staff evaluations should include random audits of feeding logs and mock allergen scenarios.

Webcams and transparency Many owners choose a dog day care with webcam access for transparency and peace of mind. Webcams are a valuable safety and marketing tool if used properly. They help owners confirm schedule adherence and give staff an extra layer of accountability. Webcams do not replace staff supervision during feeding because camera angles can miss subtle behaviors such as a dog gulping or guarding in a blind spot. Cameras are most useful for verifying drop-off and pick-up times, monitoring general play, and giving owners reassurance that their dog is resting in the expected area.

Data privacy and operation. Facilities should clarify when cameras are on, where footage is stored, who can access it, and policies for sharing clips. For example, keep live feeds available to owners via secure logins and store clips for a limited period only, typically 30 to 90 days. Camera placement should provide clear views of common play and rest areas, but avoid private spaces where staff might change.

Treats, enrichment, and consistency Treats are a behavioral tool and a temptation. Day cares must choose whether to offer communal treats for training or to restrict treats to owner-provided items. Training treats used during group sessions should be small, low-calorie, and made of simple ingredients to limit allergy risks. For enrichment that involves food puzzles or Kongs, staff should sanitize devices between uses and avoid mixing fill materials between dogs.

Trade-offs and edge cases Every policy requires trade-offs. Strict demands for original packaging can be inconvenient if an owner runs out of the factory bag, but they reduce cross-contamination. Requiring recent fecal exams improves parasite control yet adds cost for owners and may discourage enrollment if tests are not locally offered. Having separate feeding areas reduces risk but increases labor and space requirements. When space is limited, rotating feeding times reduces overlap but lengthens the schedule.

Edge case: a dog on a raw diet Raw-fed dogs present higher pathogen exposure risk. Some centers accept raw diets only if frozen, vacuum sealed, and handled with stringent hygiene protocols, or they may refuse raw entirely. If accepted, staff must have a written protocol for storage, preparation, and cleanup to reduce bacterial contamination. Owners should be prepared for extra fees or restrictions. From experience, roughly half of facilities permit raw food with strict controls, while the remainder do not.

Edge case: medication administration with meals A dog that must receive medication with food needs strict timing. For pills that require a full stomach, staff plan the pill to be given during the owner-specified meal block, then confirm the dog ingested the med before releasing them back to play. Record-keeping must explicitly show time given and staff initials to avoid missed doses. Pills accidentally dropped or spat out are treated as a medication error and are remedied immediately with owner notification and documentation.

Recordkeeping and owner communication A daily log that records feedings, treats, medication, elimination, and any unusual behavior greatly reduces misunderstandings. For example, note that Buddy received 1/2 cup of brand X kibble with one fish oil capsule at 11:05 a.m., had a soft stool at 2:30 p.m., and refused the afternoon Kong. These details allow owners and staff to detect patterns, such as new GI upset after a change of food.

When incidents occur, transparency matters. If a dog receives the wrong food, call the owner immediately, describe the exposure, advise on signs to watch, and follow the written emergency authorization. In my experience, quick, honest communication reduces owner anxiety and results in fewer disputes.

Choosing the best dog day care for an allergic dog Finding the best dog day care when your dog has allergies means asking targeted questions. Does the facility require vaccine proof and recent medical records? How do they store and handle owner-provided food? What are their protocols for separating dogs during feeding? Do

they have a written allergy response plan and trained staff for medication administration? What is their staff to dog ratio during feeding windows?

Visit the facility during a feeding block. Watch how staff handle multiple dogs, whether bowls are labeled and cleaned between uses, and how calm the environment stays. If the center has webcams, ask to view recorded feeding times. A good facility will allow you to bring your own sealed containers, will welcome specific instructions, and will walk you through their emergency procedures.

Final practical tips from experience

- Bring food labeled in an airtight container, with clear written instructions including the brand and portion size.
- If your dog has a severe allergy, include an up-to-date veterinary action plan and emergency contact numbers.
- Consider trial days before full enrollment to observe how your dog responds to the environment and feeding routine.
- Keep the day care informed of any changes in diet, behavior, or medication; small changes may alter how staff need to feed and supervise.
- Expect a short orientation for your dog and yourself that includes feeding times, pickup windows, and how staff communicate incidents.

Feeding procedures and allergy management at dog day care are not glamorous, but they are foundational. When policies are thoughtful, documentation is precise, and staff are trained, feeding time becomes a moment of quiet control in a busy day, rather than a liability. My recommendation to owners is to prioritize facilities that combine clear vaccine requirements, strict food handling, and proactive allergy protocols. Those centers will keep your dog healthier and let you leave with confidence.