

HSUS undercover investigation reveals sick puppies, dead puppy at American Kennels pet store

New York City store left ailing dogs alone for long periods over Thanksgiving weekend; at least one of them later died

December 2021

Undercover in a notorious puppy store

Puppies with hair loss and infections; puppies struggling to breathe in cages hidden from the public in a sick room and a cold basement; and sick puppies left alone for almost 24 hours from Thanksgiving Day into Friday morning, with one of them found dead days later. Our hidden cameras captured all of this and more in Manhattan's American Kennels, a pet store that has been a fixture in New York City since 1954, attracting customers with its cute puppies in the window.



A shih tzu puppy who suffered from skin issues, hair loss and a cough was placed in a cage in a very cold basement room under American Kennels and treated with ad hoc remedies, instead of being taken promptly to a veterinarian.

For six weeks between late October and early December 2021, an investigator with the Humane Society of the United States worked undercover at American Kennels, documenting behind-the-scenes sick room cages brimming with unhealthy puppies and more sick puppies in sales floor cages; puppies “treated” by pet store staff instead of being sent to a veterinary clinic for immediate care; and some puppies who were still sick being sold to unsuspecting customers without disclosure of their recent issues. HSUS researchers also found that many puppies were shipped to the store from known puppy mills as far away as Kansas, Nebraska and Missouri, including some commercial breeders who appeared in our prior [Horrible Hundred reports](#) on problem puppy mills.

On Nov. 30, after the HSUS investigator found the toy goldendoodle puppy who had died in the store, the HSUS contacted local authorities, offered our footage and documentation, and asked them to investigate our findings.

Our findings at American Kennels

- Our investigator repeatedly asked store managers to take an extremely sick toy goldendoodle to a veterinarian. Instead, employees force-fed the dog, who was not eating on her own, and treated the puppy with medications they had on hand. On Nov. 28, after the puppy had been left alone in the store for long periods of time, including most of Thanksgiving Day and into Friday morning, the puppy was found dead in her cage. A co-worker said the puppy had not been eating on her own for days before she died.
- Managers often failed to take sick puppies to a veterinarian and instead instructed staff to treat most of them in the store. Those dogs include some puppies struggling to breathe and others with bloody diarrhea, skin infections, hair loss, nasal discharge, fevers or signs of respiratory infections. Some of the ad hoc remedies provided by pet store employees included force-feeding puppies, forcibly giving large amounts of fluids under the skin, giving antibiotics that were not prescribed by a veterinarian for a specific dog's condition, not dosing properly and not using single sterile syringes for each puppy when dispensing oral treatments. One employee was caught on camera advising customers to not take their dachshund puppy to a veterinarian if she developed symptoms at home. The employee told the family they could save money instead and have store employees treat her.
- In back rooms and in a cold basement out of public view, sick puppies languished in cages that were often filthy. Some cages were smeared with feces to such an extent that the dogs had no clean place to stand. When the sick rooms filled up, some sick puppies were moved to the sales floor even though they were still ill. The store then knowingly sold some of the sick puppies to unsuspecting families.
- Many of the puppies were seen visibly shivering in their cages. They were given very little bedding to preserve their body heat even though the store's heater was not working properly for about two weeks. A thermostat in the store read 63 degrees during the day, but the temperature likely dropped below that at night, and in the basement where some of the sick dogs were kept.
- The HSUS investigator never saw puppies let out for regular exercise, despite what the store told its customers, and larger puppies such as a chow, a Labrador retriever a golden retriever and others were often kept in tiny cages meant for smaller dogs like Yorkies, sometimes for weeks.
- The store purchased puppies from at least three breeders who have been in one or more of the HSUS's annual nationwide [Horrible Hundred](#) reports on problem puppy mills, and from another breeder, Daniel Gingerich, who was [recently shut down](#) in Iowa after sick, dead and emaciated dogs were found on his property.



A toy goldendoodle who wasn't eating on her own and had to be force-fed died in the store over Thanksgiving weekend, after American Kennels refused to take her to a veterinary hospital for urgent care.

- Puppies shipped to the store arrived filthy and often sick. The HSUS investigator also documented some puppies who arrived at the store with genetic abnormalities, including a French bulldog unable to use her back legs. Although this Frenchie was unable to stand up normally, she arrived at the store with records indicating she was healthy. A co-worker told the investigator that the Frenchie would be returned to the breeder.
- In apparent violation of New York City’s pet store ordinance, American Kennels staff often refused to identify the breeders of its puppies to potential puppy buyers who asked. American Kennels also purchased puppies from at least three “B dealers,” which are otherwise known as brokers (resellers), another apparent violation of the city law.



A very sick toy poodle who wouldn’t eat was force-fed and given other ad hoc remedies in a back room at American Kennels, instead of being taken promptly to a veterinarian. After a store worker injected fluids under her skin, she developed an abscess, but she still wasn’t taken to a veterinarian until days later.

Investigator’s log notes reveal heartbreaking humane concerns

At any given time, the store had approximately 60 puppies in stock, with up to 20 of those puppies hidden away in sick rooms and in the basement. Issues with specific sick animals are too numerous to list here, but included the following descriptions, summarized from the investigator’s log notes:

Oct. 23: On the first day of employment, our investigator found a beagle so sick that it seemed as if he could not open his eyes. It appeared that he hadn’t eaten several meals left in his cage.

Oct. 24: When the investigator asked a co-worker whether the store would get veterinary care for the sick beagle puppy, the co-worker laughed and said, “No, nine times out of 10, they won’t do it because it requires them to spend money.”



One of the sick rooms at American Kennels.

Oct. 31: At least twice, a salesperson tried to sell sick puppies to interested customers—without telling the customers the puppies were sick. One of these pups, a merle goldendoodle, was sold, and customers were not, to our investigator’s knowledge, told the puppy had been undergoing treatment in the store’s sick room.



A puppy with hair loss and skin pustules at American Kennels.

Nov. 5: There were more sick puppies than available sick room cages in the store. Two sick Maltese puppies (coughing, eye infection) were moved from the sick room onto the sales floor to make room in the sick room for a shih-tzu showing signs of severe upper respiratory infection. The sick Maltese puppies were put into sales floor cages to be made available to unsuspecting customers.

Three French bulldogs arrived at the store with genetic deformities and were deemed unfit for sale and scheduled for return to their breeder. Although these dogs arrived at the store with certificates of health from their breeder, one of them had a spine or hip abnormality so severe she was unable to stand normally; the other Frenchie had a deformity of the eyelid. The third had a severe underbite.

Nov. 7: An extremely fragile toy poodle who had weighed little more than 1 pound on arrival at the store days earlier was not eating. Instead of rushing the dog immediately to a veterinarian, the store kept the puppy in its sick room area, and a pet store employee force-fed the puppy baby food and injected her with fluids. The puppy later developed an abscess where the worker injected the fluids and, again, she was treated with a makeshift method instead of being taken immediately to a veterinarian for urgent care—a crushed antibiotic pill was applied to the infected area. The puppy only got worse, and was finally taken to a veterinarian in December, but not until she had suffered in the sick room needlessly for weeks.

Nov. 12: A “bernedoodle” pup who had been treated to a week of ad-hoc care in the store for coughing and bloody diarrhea was nonetheless placed in a sales floor cage and shown to a customer, apparently without disclosure of his recent illness.

Nov. 14: A “poochon” puppy who had been sold the previous week was returned to the store for “treatment” because she wasn’t eating. The puppy was force-fed by store employees and placed in a sales floor cage among other sick puppies, instead of being immediately taken to a veterinarian for examination or diagnostics.

Nov. 19: A shih tzu puppy had signs of hair loss and visible skin inflammation. Instead of being taken immediately to a veterinarian for care and treatment, she was taken to the sick room not for her ongoing skin condition, but because she had a cough. A week or two passed and she was brought downstairs and placed in a cage in the basement to languish for another week. The basement room was next to the trash, smelled like rodent fecal matter and was “freezing cold,” according to the investigator. The puppy had visible pustules and hairless patches throughout her body.



A Pomeranian puppy at American Kennels suffered from an apparent upper respiratory infection, with a cough and eye and nasal discharge.

Nov. 27-28: Over Thanksgiving Day and into Friday morning, very sick puppies were left alone in the store for about 24 hours. Before the holiday, the undercover investigator had asked pet store managers to take a toy goldendoodle to the veterinarian because she was acutely ill. Instead, she was left alone in the pet store while it was closed, along with many other sick puppies. On Sunday, Nov. 28, the undercover investigator arrived and the puppy was dead. Our investigator then saw the puppy wrapped up in an orange blanket that was secured with duct tape and carried away.

Dec. 3: This was the undercover investigator’s last day in the store. On that date, she documented many sick puppies, not only in the store’s sick rooms and basement but out on the sales floor. These included at least 10 puppies on the sales floor who had visible signs of illness, including repeatedly coughing or sneezing: a keeshond, a tri-colored Aussie, a Cavalier King Charles spaniel, a shih tzu/poodle mix, a poodle, two Maltese puppies, a teacup Maltese, a Jack Russell terrier and a Pomeranian. In addition to the sick puppies offered for sale to the public, the investigator counted at least five puppies in the sick room upstairs and three in the basement sick room.

Many of the dogs on the sales floor were dogs that had been moved out of the sick room areas prematurely for sale. The investigator stated, “The reason the numbers were so low in the sick room upstairs is because [a store employee] moved a lot out and wouldn’t put the ones I told him were coughing or sneezing in the sick room.” At least one of the dogs who was on the sales floor had been taken directly from the sick room even though the poodle puppy was still coughing. The puppy “was coughing the entire day,” according to the investigator. The footage of the sick dogs is being turned over to the appropriate authorities.

Where does American Kennels get the puppies it sells?

When our investigator asked a co-worker why a newly arrived chow puppy was already in the store’s sick room, the worker said, “Because he’s sick – they come in with all kinds of [expletive].” They come in from puppy mills, which the store denies when customers ask about the origins of the dogs.



One of the Missouri puppy mills that supplies puppies to American Kennels.

HSUS researchers studied shipping documents that linked American Kennels to large commercial breeders and brokers in top puppy mill states, including Iowa, Indiana, Kansas, Nebraska and Missouri. At least three of the breeders who supplied puppies to the store in 2021—Milton Lewis in Nebraska, Raymond Lawson in Missouri and Rebecca Eiler in Kansas—have appeared in our [Horrible Hundred reports](#) on problem puppy mills.

But American Kennels’ sales staff often refused to show paperwork to customers who wanted to see where their puppies were born. A couple who wanted to buy a Labrador puppy at the store asked to see the puppy’s papers and were told they could not review them. The couple explained that other stores sometimes get puppies from “bad places” and that they wanted to make sure the dog’s breeder was in good standing. Finally, the staffer rebuffed the couple by stating, “If you don’t want to buy the dog, then don’t.”

New York City law requires pet stores to share information about puppy sources and medical treatments. According to the law, pet shops must provide purchasers with a “record of any known disease, sickness, or congenital condition that adversely affects the health of the animal at the time of sale,” and must disclose a variety of other details related to the health and sources of animals. In addition, the law requires: “Every pet shop selling dogs or cats must post conspicuously, in close proximity to the cages of such dogs and cats offered for sale, notices containing the following language in one hundred-point type: ‘Information



Daniel Gingerich in Iowa, who was one of the breeders who sold puppies to American Kennels, was shut down and his license was revoked in October after emaciated, sick and dead dogs were found at his puppy mill.

on the source of these dogs and cats and the veterinary treatments received by these dogs and cats is available for review by prospective purchasers. United States Department of Agriculture inspection reports are available upon request.”¹ Our investigators found no such information posted in the store.

Similar issues at many New York pet stores spark the need for new law

These findings are extensively documented with investigation notes and undercover footage, which have been offered to local authorities for review and further action.

This is only the latest of several HSUS examinations of pet stores in New York. We’ve found again and again that pet stores in New York are linked to puppy mills, that their puppies are often sick, and that pet stores often dupe consumers into buying expensive, unhealthy dogs from puppy mills. The findings by the HSUS, combined with many investigations by the state’s [New York State Office of Attorney General](#) and [local agencies](#), prove that puppy-selling pet stores are an ongoing problem across the state.

Last year, a judge fined the former owner of Chelsea Kennel Club in New York City almost [\\$4 million](#) after a prior HSUS investigation proved the store knowingly failed to give proper care to sick dogs and sold sick puppies to an unsuspecting public. The [2017 HSUS investigation](#) of Chelsea Kennel Club showed employees violently smacking at puppies with towels and mistreating them, as well as selling puppies to undercover buyers without disclosing that the puppies had a history of illness or aggression. The pet store shut down just a few months after HSUS released its investigation.

The HSUS also partnered with the television show [Inside Edition in 2017](#) to show that some of the puppies sold by breeders and pet stores in New York were not even the breed promised on their paperwork. And in 2011, the HSUS visited many pet stores in New York and also investigated documents linked to [100 pet stores in New York](#), showing they were supplied by mass-breeding facilities known as puppy mills and/or brokers linked to puppy mills.

New York has a puppy lemon law and other laws designed to protect consumers from purchasing sick puppies, but issues are still ongoing. In November 2021, the U.S. Department of Justice shut down a horrific [USDA-licensed breeder in Iowa](#), Daniel Gingerich, and the state [fined him \\$60,000](#), after he was found with dead, sick and emaciated dogs in his possession. Records indicate that American Kennels, and more than a dozen other pet stores in New York, were purchasing puppies from Gingerich in 2020 and 2021. Some of the other New York pet stores that purchased from Gingerich include: Astoria Pets, Astoria; Vanity Pups, Bayside; Zoo-Rama Pets, Bronx; NYC Breeders, Brooklyn; Puppy Paradise, Brooklyn; Hey Pets, Flushing; Westchester Puppies and Kittens, Hartsdale; Shake a Paw, Hicksville; Luxury Puppies, Massapequa; L.I. Puppy Sales, New Hyde Park; and The Left Paw, New Hyde Park, among others.

Due to these and many other issues with puppy stores in New York, the state legislature has twice considered legislation to end the sale of puppies in pet stores statewide. The Puppy Mill Pipeline Act,

¹ N.Y.C. Admin. Code §17-1703

A.4283/S.1130, passed the New York Senate this year, and will continue to be considered in the legislature next year. Similar bills ending the sale of puppies in retail stores have already passed in five other states and at least 409 localities nationwide. It's time for New York to join California, Maryland, Maine, Illinois and Washington by passing a similar law.

The HSUS urges anyone who has purchased a sick puppy from American Kennels, or any other store in New York, to contact the [New York State Office of the Attorney General](#). Buyers can also report a sick puppy to the HSUS at humanesociety.org/puppycomplaint and to their local humane law enforcement agencies.