



Dog Allergic People and Courthouse Dogs

Although allergies to dogs are fairly common, few people are affected by encountering a dog in a large, open public area similar to the lobby of a building or a courtroom, as long as they do not touch the dog. The primary problem arises when an individual needs to be in an enclosed area shared with a dog.

Knowing this, the first thing a courthouse dog program needs to do is to provide a no-dog zone whenever possible. In a child advocacy center, set aside one area that the Facility Dog does not usually enter. Try to maintain one interview room that is dog-free.

A more significant problem arises if a member of the staff at a facility is allergic to dogs. It will become the dog handler's responsibility to see that the dogs and its environment are managed in such a way as to minimize the problem.

A Facility Dog should be impeccably groomed, including being bathed frequently. Between baths, the animal can be wiped down with special pet wipes (available online or in many pet stores) or with baby wipes. Keeping a package of these wipes in the handler's office will allow the dog to always be as clean as possible.

The office or working area where the dog spends most of its time should ideally have a hard surfaced floor, which can be thoroughly cleaned easily. If the floor is carpeted a regular program of vacuuming with a vacuum cleaner equipped with a HEPA filter will be necessary.

Rugs and bedding that the dog uses will need to be washed weekly in hot water. If the dog occupies a crate during part of the day (an excellent management tool), the crate will need to be cleaned thoroughly on a regular basis. In an enclosed room where the dog spends time, airborne allergens will be reduced if a HEPA air cleaner is run at least 4 hours each day. These HEPA air filtration units are now widely available at a number of stores. If it is possible to provide ventilation with fresh outside air, that is one of the most effective ways to reduce the concentration of allergens.

Because dog saliva is especially allergenic, Facility Dogs, of course, should be trained to never lick a person's hand or face. Everyone who handles the dog should be encouraged to wash their hands afterwards when possible.

Information about managing allergies to dogs can be found at the **Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America**.