



Office of the State Veterinarian
Discovery Hall, Suite 100
1202 East 38th Street
Indianapolis, IN 46205-2898
Phone: 317/544-2400
Kyle Shipman, DVM, State Veterinarian

CONSUMER ADVISORY

Shopping for a New Pet? 'Tis the Season to Beware of Scams! (18 November 2025)

The internet offers a convenient way to order household basics, gifts and groceries. But think twice before buying a puppy or other pet online—you just might end up being scammed.

The Indiana State Board of Animal Health (BOAH) has seen a significant up-tic in complaints from individuals shopping for puppies online who have lost a significant amount of money—sometimes thousands of dollars—with nothing to show for it.

Social media posts are a very common source of scams, along with legitimate-looking websites. Listed pets may not exist because the scammer stole photos from another website. The sale generally requires a significant payment upfront.

Transportation Scams

When agreeing to the purchase or adoption of a pet, discuss how the animal will be transported if you cannot pick up the pet yourself. A common scam involves a seller who arranges transportation with several upfront fees that increase while the pet is in transit. The transporter or seller will contact the buyer to ask for additional payments for added expenses or fees or permits that “suddenly come up” during shipping. All too often the seller says the animal has been detained in another state during a stop-over and the transporter must pay an extra fee for a permit to a government agency. Government agencies do NOT charge fees for pet movements within the United States.

Whether buying or adopting, the Indiana State Board of Animal Health advises everyone to take steps to be sure the source of the pet is legitimate.

Tips for Consumers:

1. Research the breeder or rescue/adoption center before sending any form of payment. Look for contact information, check credentials, and confirm reviews from previous clients by direct contact. Ask about the breeder/adopter and the pet’s background. Consider searching the Better Business Bureau for possible complaints against the seller.
2. Make an in-person visit. Meet the dog breeder, the puppy, and the parents of the puppy.
3. Talk to others who have purchased pets from the breeder.
4. Ask friends, family, coworkers, or your veterinarian for a referral to a reputable breeder/rescue.
5. Consult with a veterinarian about which dog breeds would be best for your family. Ask your veterinarian for local breeder recommendations.

**Safeguarding Indiana’s animals, food supply and citizens for more than 135 years.
An equal opportunity employer and provider.**

6. Never pay a fee to obtain an animal that you have not seen with your own eyes (as opposed to via pictures or videos online).
7. Don't pay to ship a pet if you can't verify the seller is a reputable breeder or rescue organization. Pay only for direct shipping to your location.
8. Be aware that scammers can and do take legitimate business names to use as a cover.
9. Look for breeders or rescues within driving distance. This allows you to see the animal and meet the breeder or rescue before a possible purchase or adoption. You can also pick up the animal yourself when it is ready to come home. Transporting the animal yourself not only assures the animal exists but is less stressful for the animal than being shipped by commercial conveyance. Most breeds can be found within a reasonable driving distance.
10. If you virtually chat with the seller, watch for odd phrasing or typos.
11. If the seller asks you to pay via wire transfer or gift card, DON'T. This is a red flag for a scam.
12. If anyone asks you to send money overseas, particularly to pet adoption scam hotspots such as Cameroon or India, consider it a scam.
13. Beware of "free" pet offers online. These are often scams to get you to pay shipping or other fees for non-existent animals.

Report Scams

Hoosiers who believe they have been the victim of a scam or targeted by scammers should file a complaint with the Office of Indiana Attorney General at indianaconsumer.com or by calling 1-800-382-5516.

Buying or adopting a pet means you are adding a new member to your family. This is an exciting time. The excitement should be tempered with caution and skepticism to avoid the disappointment of learning the pet you were expecting never really existed. By being mindful that scammers are sophisticated and protecting yourself, you can ensure your excitement is rewarded with the addition of a new furry family member.

###