



MICHIGAN ATTORNEY GENERAL

CONSUMER

ALERT

Puppy Scams

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

Puppy scams have many elements of common consumer problems, but with the added element of cruelty. This alert will help you **SPOT** and **STOP** puppy scams.

Remember this: Puppies are sold commercially by breeders, in pet stores, and online, and any seller can use deceptive practices.

Buying a puppy direct from a breeder

Some breeders sell directly to consumers. Buy in person and demand to see the premises and the mother. When dealing directly with a breeder, look for:



Misleading websites, including websites that have very large numbers of puppies for sale but claim to have screened all their breeders.

Brokers posing as small family breeders.

Breeders who will not allow you to visit their property and offer to meet you at a “convenient” public location, or who will only show you the front of the property and not the areas where the animals are kept.

Buying a puppy from a pet store

Almost all pet store puppies come from puppy mills, but the stores pretend they are boutiques with purebreds or “designer” mixed breeds. Michigan is one of the top 10 states for the number of complaints about puppies purchased from pet stores.

Puppies in pet stores are often separated from their mothers much earlier than they should be. Pet stores do this because customers like to buy younger puppies. Responsible breeders will keep the puppies until they are eight weeks old and won't want their puppies to be kept in small cages with little socialization. Good breeders want to meet the owners of their puppies to ensure they are going to the right homes and will typically require the buyer to promise to spay or neuter the puppy. When buying a puppy from a pet store, look for:



Stores that do not have appropriate paperwork identifying a puppy's breeder, and when asked, only have information on the dealer (dealers have license numbers with a B in the middle, instead of an A; for example, 43-B-1234).

Stores that sell puppies that have been shipped from breeders hundreds of miles away, often in bad transport conditions, or stores that offer to sell an underage puppy (under eight weeks old).

Deceptive signage in the store or deceptive language used by store employees to make buyers think puppies come from small, humane breeders: “No puppy mills!” “registered,” “designer,” or “hypoallergenic” breeds.



Buying a puppy online

Never purchase (or put a deposit on) a pet sight-unseen. Responsible breeders do not sell their puppies to someone they have not met and screened in person. Shipping very young puppies long distances can be stressful and harmful for the puppy; do the travel yourself and pick up the puppy in person.

When you find an ad or website for puppies, avoid:



Breeders who offer to ship a puppy anywhere in the US or overseas.

Breeders who will not allow you to visit their property, instead offering to meet you at the airport or arrange transportation for the puppy.

Deceptive puppy sales tactics



Labeling puppies as “Vet-checked,” “Healthy,” or “Health-Guaranteed.” Veterinary records can be falsified.

Advertising puppies for sale as “Registerable,” or “From Registered Parents,” a designation that only requires meaningless paperwork.

Offering misleading or predatory financing, offering a leasing option, or describing the transaction as an adoption rather than a sale.

Puppy money scams

Puppy rip-off artists often use free websites, newspapers, and social media to lure victims. They advertise puppies that do not exist and send photos that are stolen from other sites. A typical internet puppy scam starts when a consumer finds a website advertising their dream puppy. The website includes pictures of adorable puppies listed by name, breed and seller. To buy a puppy, consumers must wire a few hundred dollars for a deposit to hold the puppy. Once that payment is received, the consumer is asked to send more money for shipping, insurance or other costs, like an “adoption fee.” No puppy is ever delivered.

An easy way to SPOT an online puppy scam is to conduct an online image search of the puppy’s photo to see where else the picture is posted on the internet. (Enter “how to search by image” in a search engine for instructions.) If you find the image on more than one website, it’s a good bet it is a scam.

Watch for these red flags:



Ads that offer puppies for low prices and say, “just pay shipping.”

Sellers who require non-refundable or non-traceable forms of payment such as a money order or wire transfer

Sellers who threaten to turn you in for animal neglect or abandonment if you refuse to send money.

Common scam tactics used by internet sellers to get more money from a consumer:



“Crate didn’t meet airline standards, so you need to pay for a different one.”

“Puppy needs medical attention, so you’ll have to pay for the services before transport.”

“Too warm/cold, we need to buy special devices to keep the pet comfortable during transport.”

“Date doesn’t work with the airline; need you to pay a reservation change fee.”

Do not deal with sellers from other countries. Even in the unlikely case that an overseas seller is legitimate, shipping young puppies such a long distance can be harmful and dangerous for the puppy.

Records to document fraud

Records you should keep include:

- Original advertisement
- Emails/conversations
- Contracts
- Refund policy
- Financing agreements
- Health guarantees
- Health certificates
- Veterinary proof of exams and vaccinations (should be on veterinary letterhead)
- Registration information, if the seller claims the animal is registerable
- Breeder/broker/store information
- Photos sent to you and photos of actual puppy (if you receive one)

Additional Resources

- [Humane Society - Where to get a puppy](https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/where-get-puppy) (humanesociety.org/resources/where-get-puppy)
- [Humane Society - How to find a responsible dog breeder](https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/how-find-responsible-dog-breeder) (humanesociety.org/resources/how-find-responsible-dog-breeder)
- [Humane Society - Pet store doublespeak](https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/pet-store-doublespeak) (humanesociety.org/resources/pet-store-doublespeak)
- [Humane Society - Fact Sheets & Resources](https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/fact-sheets-resources) (humanesociety.org/resources/fact-sheets-resources)

Where to report a puppy scam:

To report a scam, file a complaint, or get additional information, contact the Michigan Attorney General:

Consumer Protection Division
P.O. Box 30213
Lansing, MI 48909
517-335-7599
Fax: 517-241-3771
Toll free: 877-765-8388
[Online complaint form](https://mi.gov/agcomplaints) (mi.gov/agcomplaints)

You can also report a puppy scam to:

- [The Better Business Bureau](https://www.bbb.org/consumer-complaints/file-a-complaint/get-started) (bbb.org/consumer-complaints/file-a-complaint/get-started)
- [The Humane Society of the United States - online puppy buyer complaint form](https://www.humanesociety.org/forms/puppy-buyer-complaint-form) (humanesociety.org/forms/puppy-buyer-complaint-form)
- [The FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center \(IC3\) - puppy money scams](https://www.ic3.gov) (ic3.gov)

The Attorney General provides Consumer Alerts to inform the public of unfair, misleading, or deceptive business practices, and to provide information and guidance on other issues of concern. Consumer Alerts are not legal advice, legal authority, or a binding legal opinion from the Department of Attorney General.



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