

Petland, Inc.: Sick puppies, heartbroken families

A new undercover investigation reveals sick puppies at Petland stores in Las Vegas, Nevada, and Kennesaw, Georgia, including dead puppy at Georgia location

Petland, Inc.¹ is an international chain of puppy-selling pet stores with more than 80 locations in the United States. Almost all of Petland's stores sell puppies, with some franchises selling approximately 1,000 puppies a year. The Humane Society of the United States has received more than 1,200 complaints related to sick Petland puppies since 2006.

Two investigations by the Humane Society of the United States in [2008](#) and [2009](#) linked Petland's stores to inhumane, large-scale dog breeders that prioritize profit above animal welfare, known as puppy mills, as well as to distributors, aka brokers, that re-sell puppies en masse to pet stores. Petland claims it has changed its ways, but the Humane Society of the United States continues to



Puppies in the Kennesaw, Georgia, Petland store were often kept in crowded cages, with five puppies sometimes occupying a space more suitable for two. They received no regular exercise outside of their cages. / HSUS, 2018

receive complaints about sick puppies bought from Petland stores across the country. To further investigate, we placed undercover investigators with hidden cameras in two different Petland stores in fall 2018. One investigator worked at the Petland in Kennesaw, Georgia, in September and October, and another worked at the Petland in Las Vegas in November. What we saw was heartbreaking.

Findings included:

- A Kennesaw, Georgia, Petland store employee told our undercover investigator that she sometimes came into work and found puppies who had “passed away.” The employee said this happened about

¹ The Petland, Inc. chain of stores is not affiliated with Petland Discounts chain of stores in NY, NJ and CT.

three times during the four months she had been working there. She also told our investigator she tried hard to save the lives of puppies who were dying.

- After hearing about other puppies who had died at the Kennesaw store, our investigator became suspicious about a black plastic bag in the freezer. When no one was looking, she opened the bag and found a dead puppy inside. She documented the incident on hidden camera.
- At both the Kennesaw and Las Vegas locations, numerous sick puppies were kept in barren isolation rooms out of sight of customers, including puppies who were coughing, lethargic or had mucus coming from their noses.
- A very sick Maltese puppy in the Las Vegas Petland store had been confined in a cage in a back room for about a month, according to an employee. The employee told our undercover investigator they were waiting for him to die. Our investigator found out he was about to be sent back to the distributor, Pinnacle Pet, a massive broker based in Missouri, for a refund. To spare him from an uncertain fate, she asked the manager if she could buy or adopt the puppy herself. But Petland's manager refused to sell him, stating the store had already received a refund for the puppy. He said,



A dead puppy in the freezer at the Kennesaw, Georgia, Petland never got a chance to be part of a family. And at the Las Vegas Petland, our investigator tried to take home a seriously ill puppy to prevent Petland from shipping him back to Missouri for a refund, but the store manager refused. / HSUS, 2018.

“that’s how situations like this are handled.” The puppy was then shipped back on a truck. Our investigator asked the manager, “What do they do with it when they send it back?” He replied, “I have no idea.” The incident contradicts Petland’s website’s [claim](#) that “EVERY puppy finds a home” at Petland.

- A large-breed puppy who was labelled a “jumper” was kept in a stacked cage high off the ground at the Kennesaw store. Our investigator witnessed an employee dropping him while trying to take him out of his cage, and the puppy was seen repeatedly screeching in pain.
- Some puppies at both stores lived for months in crowded cages. Most of the puppies received no regular exercise outside their cages unless potential buyers asked to play with them. In the Kennesaw store in particular, cages suitable for two puppies often held four or five puppies.
- Records obtained by the HSUS from the Georgia Department of Agriculture in November 2018 indicate the Kennesaw store has been inspected multiple times due to puppies with parvovirus, respiratory infections and Giardia, some of which were reported by citizens who had purchased sick puppies. In December 2017, a number of puppies in the store were quarantined for illness. The store passes most of its inspections because it is able to show documents indicating sick puppies are monitored by a veterinarian. But our investigator at the Kennesaw store witnessed several puppy veterinary “exams” that lasted as short as 15 seconds.
- Our investigator saw numerous medications in the back room at the Kennesaw store, including a bottle labelled only “The Cure.” Pet store staff said the concoction had been mixed together by a supervisor at

the store. The bottle did not have a veterinary label nor any ingredients or dosages listed on the label, yet staff said they had been instructed to give it to puppies who had a poor appetite.

- Puppies weren't the only sick or injured animals we saw at Petland. In the Las Vegas store, our undercover employee filmed a bird with a broken wing and another bird with a head injury, both of whom were stored in a glass aquarium in a back room. Other birds had mutilated themselves by plucking out feathers.
- Truckloads of puppies were delivered weekly to both of the stores from out-of-state brokers (re-sellers), which Petland calls "distributors." Some of the puppies in the Las Vegas store came from a distributor, Pinnacle Pet, where nine puppies died after being left on a hot truck in 2015, according to United States Department of Agriculture records. And many of the puppies in the Georgia store came from a distributor in Indiana called Blue Ribbon Puppies, which delivers large numbers of puppies to many of Petland's stores, including all of its Georgia stores², and was linked to an outbreak of a drug-resistant disease by the CDC last year³. The disease, Campylobacter, infected more than a hundred people, most of whom contracted it through Petland puppies, according to the CDC's [outbreak advisory](#)⁴.

At the Las Vegas store, in a last-ditch effort to save the sick Maltese puppy and keep him from being sent back to the supplier, our undercover investigator called humane law enforcement. She relayed her concerns about the injured birds as well as the sick Maltese. Humane law enforcement agents came to the store just as the broker truck was arriving to take the puppy away. A few days later, the investigator asked for an update on her complaint. Law enforcement told her that the puppy had received a health check clearing him for travel, and thus they could find no legal reason to prevent Petland from sending the puppy away. It is unknown what happened to the puppy after he left the store, or what happened to the injured birds.



A Maltese puppy in the Las Vegas store whom employees said had been born with "a hole in his throat" was shipped back to the broker for a refund, even though our undercover employee offered to purchase him to spare him from an unknown fate. /HSUS, 2018

Dead puppies and sick puppies

Accusations of sick animals are nothing new for Petland. In February 2017, a veterinarian who had worked with the Kennesaw, Georgia, Petland store for almost ten years, Dr. Michael Good, wrote a witness affidavit detailing the myriad diseases he saw in Petland's puppies: "There was no way for me to save all of the animals from death

² According to shipping documents obtained by the HSUS through public records requests between 2016 and 2018.

³ According to records the HSUS received as part of a public records request from the Indiana Department of Health in 2018.

⁴ In a later report, the CDC confirmed that additional cases may still be occurring but are no longer being tracked.

and prolonged illness because they were already incredibly sick when they arrived at the store,” he wrote. Dr. Good [told ABC News](#) he had seen numerous dead animals in the freezer at Petland Kennesaw in Georgia – the same store where our undercover employee found the dead puppy in the freezer in October 2018.

“They’d open up their freezer and there’d be dead animals in there,” Dr. Good told the news station. “Dogs: they ask two things of us as people. They want to be loved and they want to be remembered. But none of these animals I saw in those freezers were ever loved or remembered. They were just a statistic.”

Puppies in pet stores are often sick, because many of them come from inhumane and unsanitary facilities known as puppy mills. The puppies are crowded onto large broker trucks with scores of other puppies for shipment across the country, making it easy for a single sick puppy to infect many others. Buyers have reported paying hundreds of dollars, and sometimes over \$10,000 in [veterinary bills](#) trying to treat sick puppies sold by Petland. In many cases, their puppies still died. In addition to more than 1,200 complaints received by HSUS, the website *ConsumerAffairs.com* has more than [580 reviews](#) of Petland, most of them critical. Many of those reviewers also complained of sick and dying puppies, and some said Petland, through its warranty company, refused to compensate them fully for their veterinary costs.

“This has been a nightmare for my entire family and especially my 10 year old daughter as this was part of her Christmas as well. Now we are home without our little Barkley as he is fighting for his life in a local animal hospital.”

- a Kennesaw, Georgia, Petland puppy buyer

Buyers have reported sick puppies from Petland stores across the country, not just the stores that HSUS recently filmed. For example:

- A woman whose family bought a puppy from the **Sarasota, Florida**, Petland store in September 2018 told the HSUS the puppy collapsed and began having seizures within two days of purchase. The puppy’s issues were linked to a liver shunt, a congenital condition. She wrote, “The vet informed me that the puppy was sold to me sick and that eventually he would have had the seizure that he had early that day because his body had a high level of toxins. My puppy was in a coma and continued to have seizures while under life support. We called Petland [to tell them] what happened and they are not willing to pay the medical expenses for this incident. It was cruel to put a puppy and my family through this.”
- A buyer who purchased a puppy from the **Orlando, Florida**, Petland location in fall 2018 told the HSUS he noticed the puppy was vomiting in the store, but the salesperson assured the family it was nothing serious. They purchased the puppy, but she later became so sick that she had to be euthanized to relieve her suffering. The store then initially refused to cover any veterinary bills.
- A complainant whose boyfriend brought home a puppy from the **Crystal Lake, Illinois**, Petland in 2017 told the HSUS her puppy had multiple, expensive health issues. “Upon looking at her, she had an obvious eye infection. I took her to our veterinarian the next morning. She has kennel cough, pneumonia, a partially collapsed lung, and an eye infection. The pneumonia is so severe that through months of antibiotics, [and] a bronchial levage, she is not better and now has to have a lung lobectomy. I feel they knew how sick she was since [Petland] had her on Baytril at one point before she was sold to us.” The complainant’s boyfriend spent \$2,600 for the puppy, but they accrued \$3,400 in vet bills and would need another \$5,000 to \$6,000 for the puppy’s surgery, the complainant said.

- A complainant who adopted a puppy who had originally been purchased from the **Rome, Georgia**, Petland store in 2015 is still dealing with a disabled pet years later. The puppy suffered from repeated seizures, vomiting, poor development and neurological issues, and required surgery for a liver disorder. Although he survived, the dog still suffered from neurological issues and had permanent disabilities two years after he was originally purchased, according to his new owner.
- A buyer who took home a puppy from the **Kennesaw, Georgia**, Petland store for Christmas in 2017 told the HSUS she paid \$5,000 “for a puppy that was deathly ill.” Shortly after the purchase, the puppy “was vomiting blood and diarrhea with trouble breathing.” He was taken to an emergency veterinary clinic, where “they declared him to be in critical condition and suffering from severe internal bleeding with a huge list of other critical issues caused by a parasite that had gone untreated. He also had pneumonia, an upper respiratory infection and blood sugar so low it was unreadable as well as a dangerously low white blood cell count.” The complainant added, “While I was in the local emergency vet, five other animals came in in critical condition from the same pet store and location with the same symptoms as mine. This has been a nightmare for my entire family and especially my 10-year-old daughter as this was part of her Christmas as well. Now we are home without our little Barkley as he is fighting for his life in a local animal hospital.” Sadly, the puppy passed away shortly thereafter.

Some former employees have confirmed to HSUS and on Glassdoor.com that the puppies in Petland stores where they worked were often sick. One stated on Glassdoor.com, “I saw at least twenty puppies die within my six months [as] an employee.” Another wrote, “Dogs died in my arms.”

Petland distributors linked to drug-resistant disease outbreak, other problems

Undercover investigations from the Humane Society of the United States have found that puppies in pet stores are often dosed repeatedly with strong antibiotics, often at staff discretion and with scant veterinary oversight, to address illnesses like respiratory infections, diarrhea and parasites that are common in puppies raised in large-scale commercial breeding operations. But instead of solving the problem, this has only led to a larger threat—antibiotic-resistant bacteria that can spread to humans, making some individuals who worked with or purchased Petland puppies so sick that they had to be hospitalized.



A bottle labeled simply “The Cure,” which did not have a professional label and had no ingredients or dosages listed on it, was stored with other drugs in the back room at the Kennesaw store. Some of the employees told our investigator that a supervisor told them to give the concoction to puppies with poor appetites, and they did not know what was in it. /HSUS, 2018

In January 2018, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [reported](#) that a multi-state outbreak of human *Campylobacter* infections had sickened [113 people](#) in 17 different states (a number that later increased to 118 people in 18 states); most of the people infected had had recent contact with puppies from Petland stores, and 23 people were hospitalized. In February 2018, Atlanta news station WSB-TV [reported](#) that a teenager who worked at the Mall of Georgia Petland became seriously ill after being exposed to a puppy harboring *Campylobacter*. The victim, Katie Singleton, was rushed to the hospital with a fever near 105. “It felt like you were dying,” she told the station after spending four days in the hospital.

“It’s something as a parent you don’t think of,” her mother told the news station. “You buy a puppy for Christmas; you don’t think it will be dangerous to your child.”

Consumers have repeatedly sued Petland for allegedly selling sick puppies and misleading buyers, and sometimes for allegedly making their human families ill. A November 2018 lawsuit against the Novi, Michigan, Petland alleges that a consumer became violently ill after purchasing a sick puppy who passed on a *Campylobacter* infection to his owner; the man alleges he, like Katie Singleton, was so ill he had to be [hospitalized](#).

In a September 2018 report, the CDC warned that the over-use of antibiotics in pets sold at pet stores increases public risk for drug-resistant strains of disease. Approximately 95 percent of pet store puppies the [CDC studied](#) had been medicated with strong drugs, sometimes as a preventive measure, which leads to the drug-resistant strains, the CDC report indicated. Because of the [mingling of puppies from different breeders and distributors during transport](#) and in stores, the CDC said it is difficult to pinpoint or contain the sources of disease strains like the recent *Campylobacter* outbreak, and advised pet stores to be more judicious in the use of such drugs.

Most Petland stores receive puppies from massive out-of-state resellers, also called brokers or distributors, located in top puppy mill states such as Indiana, Iowa, Missouri and Ohio. Our investigation found the Kennesaw, Georgia, Petland store and many other Petland stores were still buying from Blue Ribbon Puppies in Odon, Indiana, owned by Levi Graber. Blue Ribbon Puppies was one of the suppliers linked to the *Campylobacter* outbreak by the CDC, according to public records the HSUS obtained from the Indiana Department of Health.

The Petland store in Kennesaw was one of five Petland stores in Georgia alone that received puppies from Blue Ribbon Puppies this year. For example, during the summer of 2018, Blue Ribbon Puppies sold 161 puppies to Petland stores in Dalton, Dunwoody, Kennesaw, the Mall of Georgia in Buford, and Rome, Georgia. Many of the stores received shipments on the same day, indicating the same truck went from store to store. And altogether, the five Petland stores in Georgia received more than 450 puppies from Blue Ribbon and other brokers, including JAKS Puppies in Iowa and Homes for Canines in Ohio, during the same three month period.

In addition, the Las Vegas store and some other Petland stores also received puppies from Pinnacle Pet (Sobrad, LLC), the Missouri broker that was cited by the USDA in 2015 after nine puppies died on an overheated transport vehicle. Both Pinnacle and Blue Ribbon Puppies also sell hundreds of puppies to other Petland stores across the country, including stores in Kansas and Pennsylvania. The two stores we visited and many other Petland stores also receive regular shipments from Choice Puppies, formerly known as the Hunte Corporation, a Missouri broker that has been linked to [puppy mills](#) by both the HSUS and other animal welfare groups.

Conclusion

Our undercover footage shows that sick puppies are part of the day-to-day reality in at least two Petland stores, and we believe that many other stores have similar issues. But for the most part, Petland doesn’t seem to think there’s a problem. Petland, Inc. has given a number of honors to the Kennesaw store or its employees. In 2015, Petland nominated the Kennesaw store for a [“store of the year”](#) award, and Petland gave the store’s manager its [“manager of the year”](#) award in 2016. At its [2018](#) annual convention, Petland gave a “pet counselor of the year” award to an employee at the same location – the location where both our undercover investigator and the store’s former veterinarian saw dead puppies in the freezer.

Petland’s broader history indicates that the issues we captured on camera are not unusual. Problems with veterinary care in the stores is partly to blame, and so is the transport model most pet stores rely on. When

distributors (brokers) obtain dozens of puppies from many commercial breeders and bunch them together on multi-day transports on crowded trucks, they are subjected to extreme stress at a young age, before their immune systems are fully developed. Even a single sick puppy on the truck can expose many others to an infectious illness.

As the holiday season reaches fever pitch, the Humane Society of the United States urges consumers never to buy a puppy from a pet store, because puppies in pet stores are often sick, and many of them come from inhumane dealers known as puppy mills. [Responsible breeders](#) don't sell to pet stores, because they want to meet the families who are taking home their puppies, and stay in touch in case of any problems.

The HSUS recommends visiting an animal shelter as the most humane option when getting a new pet, and if purchasing a pet, to only purchase them from a responsible breeder who will show the buyer where the puppy was born and raised. At shelters and responsible rescue centers, healthy, vaccinated puppies, dogs, cats and other small pets are available for low adoption fees, and most of them are already spayed or neutered.

For more information on how to get a puppy from a responsible source, see humanesociety.org/puppy.

Find out more information visit humanesociety.org