

Pet Insurance 101

Here at Angell, we know that you – like many of us – view your pets as vital family members. We also know how expensive their care can be and how tough it is when you are trying to balance their needs against your family’s financial resources.

As a facility that manages over 100,000 patient visits annually, we regard **pet insurance** as an essential tool for ensuring your family is prepared for the unexpected costs that can arise throughout your pet’s life. The right policy/plan can go a long way to ensuring that costs are far less of a factor when determining a course of care.

Of course, Angell understands that trying to decide on a pet insurance company/policy can be overwhelming. There are dozens of companies that offer pet insurance in Massachusetts and countless policies, options, and add-ons to consider. This guide aims to give you what you need to make informed decisions about getting pet insurance and offer some resources to help you find the best fit for your needs.

If you’re curious about exploring the option of pet insurance, we invite you to read through this brief guide to the pet insurance process.

From our viewpoint, there are four steps to consider:

1.) Understanding what pet insurance is and how it works

2.) Understanding the costs of care for your pet

3.) Deciding what kind of coverage you need

4.) Finding the best plan for you

1.) What is pet insurance and how does it work?

- Pet insurance is a contract where pet owners transfer the risk of large, unexpected veterinary bills to an insurance company in exchange for a monthly/annual premium.
- Most pet insurance policies focus on accident/illness coverage, so you shouldn't assume that your annual wellness exam will be covered. That said, some companies have an add-on, non-insurance benefit for your pet's wellness visits if desired.
- While some insurance companies will offer direct-to-vet payments, most reimburse you for your vet expense after you've already paid the vet.
- Most policies will not cover pre-existing conditions, so you shouldn't wait until coverage is needed to get a policy. The best time to get your pet insured is right after they join your family!
- Insurance premiums are based on coverage type, breed, age, and zip code, so costs vary, and there is no standard. Typically, these are paid monthly, but some companies offer a discount if you agree to pay annually in 12-month increments.

Three Important Terms to Know

Deductible - The amount you must pay before insurance coverage kicks in. Deductibles can start as low as \$100 and go as high as \$1,000. Most are annual, but some are per-condition.

Reimbursement % - This is the percentage of eligible costs reimbursed after the claim is approved. Standard percentages are 70%, 80%, and 90%. Some companies offer 100%!

Limit - There are several kinds of limitations. The most common is the annual limit, which defines the maximum coverage the policy will provide yearly. Some policies also include lifetime limits and even per-incident limits. Always read your policy! Many companies offer an unlimited policy (meaning there are no annual, lifetime, or per-incident limits).

2.) Understand the costs of caring for your pet

While the average routine vet visit is relatively affordable, urgent and emergency vet care can add up fast.

Three important statistics about emergency care

- Each year, 1 out of every 3 pets requires emergency veterinary care¹
- Every 6 seconds, a pet owner is given a vet bill of \$1000 or more²
- The average emergency vet bill is between \$800 and \$1500³

Common dog emergencies and their average price range³

- Anaphylactic shock \$500–\$1,000
- Bloat \$1,500–\$7,500
- Intestinal blockage \$800–\$7,000
- Trauma \$500–\$4,000
- Stomach issues \$700–\$3,000
- Seizures \$500–\$5,000
- Heatstroke \$1,500–\$6,000
- Poisoning \$200–\$5,000

Common cat emergencies and their average price range³

- Anaphylactic shock \$500–\$1,000
- Urinary tract blockage \$700–\$4,000
- Intestinal blockage \$800–\$7,000
- Trauma \$500–\$4,000
- Stomach issues \$200–\$2,000
- Poisoning \$200–\$2,000

As you can see, routine vet costs are much lower on average than costs for unexpected developments/emergencies. Without insurance, you would have to save significantly more annually for pet care to be financially prepared for an intensive emergency visit.

¹ Reinicke, Carmen. "Are You Prepared for a Pet Emergency? Most Americans Are Not." CNBC, June 14, 2018. <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/06/14/are-you-prepared-for-a-pet-emergency-most-americans-are-not.html>.

² "The 25 Most Interesting Facts about Pet Insurance." PRWeb, September 17, 2014. <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2014/09/prweb12168782.htm>.

³ Ferrer, Andrea. "How Much Is an Emergency Vet Visit?" Money, May 12, 2023. <https://money.com/how-much-is-an-emergency-vet-visit/>.

3. Decide what kind of coverage you need

There Are Three Standard Policy Categories

Accident / Illness

Accident Only

Wellness / Routine

(Wellness/Routine is usually only offered as a supplemental, non-insurance benefit to an existing policy for extra charge)

When considering what type of policy might be right for you, it's important to remember that not all policies cover the same things in the same ways. If you have specific concerns, please make sure you're asking questions before selecting a plan.

Here is some information about what is/is not covered:

Almost always covered:

- Hospitalization
- Medications
- Surgery
- Medical supplies
- Diagnostic tests
- X-ray, CT, Ultrasound, and MRI

Sometimes optional—sometimes included:

- Emergency/Specialty exam fees
- Dental illness
- Behavioral modification
- Rehab/Physical Therapy
- Breeding/Pregnancy
- Final Respects

Almost never covered:

- Pre-existing conditions
- Routine wellness/Preventive care*
- Exclusions**

*Many insurance companies offer a supplemental wellness plan. While it is not insurance, it can save you money if you make full use of it.

**Each pet insurance policy has a section dedicated to what is excluded from coverage. Pet Insurance companies list their exclusions on their website, and sample policies are usually available for download.

Additional information

- Coverage for pre-existing conditions is limited, but it *is* available with some policies.
- While finding a plan covering all pre-existing conditions is rare, many policies cover curable pre-existing conditions after a certain period.
- Though only one company currently offers this coverage, avian/exotic coverage does exist!

4. Find the Best Plan for You

MSPCA Angell has a dedicated **Insurance Coordinator** available to answer our clients' pet insurance questions! Please feel free to reach out for help/information:

Email: insurancecoordinator@mspca.org

Phone: (617) 655-9628

Angell's Insurance Coordinator is intended to be a local resource for clients interested in learning more about pet insurance. We **do not** base recommendations or advice on partnerships with any insurance providers or companies. We are singularly focused on discussing available options to help you find the policy that best fits your specific needs.

Do your research!

- Be sure to check with staff at the clinic/hospital/shelter in your area to see if any materials on pet insurance are available.
- There are many helpful online resources and pet insurance review sites/articles. Some sites can compare personalized quotes between several companies at once!

Try: **[PetInsuranceReview.com](https://www.petinsurance.com)** or **[Pawlicy.com](https://www.pawlicy.com)**

Guidelines for online quotes:

	Higher Monthly Premium	Lower Monthly Premium
Deductible	Lower Deductible	Higher Deductible
Reimbursement %	Higher Reimbursement %	Lower Reimbursement %
Annual Limit	Higher Annual Limit	Lower Annual Limit

Discounts are common, including multi-pet deals and bundle discounts for companies that also provide other types of insurance.

Generally speaking, while companies will usually allow you to downgrade your policy, they often will only let you upgrade it if you are willing to start from scratch. This means any conditions previously covered in a claim would become ineligible for coverage under the pre-existing condition exclusion. **Plan with the future in mind.**