

A balancing act.....

Some people don't adequately socialise their puppy because they are worried about them catching a disease. Before a puppy reaches 12 weeks of age you need to balance the risk of disease with the critical need for early socialisation. Socialisation under controlled conditions should start before the vaccination course is finished.

Due to the success of vaccination programmes in protecting pets against infectious diseases, more young dogs are now given up or euthanased in the UK due to behavioural problems than those that succumb to diseases covered by maternal immunity and vaccinations

So provide lots of different experiences for your puppy, but make sure these are away from where unvaccinated dogs may have been

Useful experiences that are lower risk include:

- Carrying your puppy out and about.
- Visiting friends and family, especially if they have other vaccinated pets for your puppy to meet and interact with.
- Inviting visitors and their fully vaccinated and de-wormed dogs to your house.
- Car journeys.

Some activities, such as going to the park, or contact with unvaccinated or unknown dogs, should be delayed until the vaccination course is finished.

Don't forget.....

that your dog can forget these lessons too! So constant reinforcement is important to ensure that behavioural development continues into adulthood. This is especially important during the first two years as they reach social maturity.

Ideas for teaching your puppy appropriate life skills:

- **Teaching your puppy to be alone.** If you intend to leave dogs alone at times it is vital that they get used to this as soon as possible. It has been shown that if puppies are not left before the age of 12 weeks they can find it extremely stressful to then be left.
- **Greeting visitors.** Consider how you would like your adult dog to behave. Ensure visitors only interact with puppies if they are sitting or showing calm greeting behaviour.
- **Introduce puppies to traffic gradually** – start off with quiet roads and monitor their behaviour to see if they are relaxed. Gradually expose them to more intense traffic.
- **Introduce your puppy to fully vaccinated friendly dogs** owned by friends or family as soon as possible. Never force an interaction – allow the dogs to approach in their own time.
- **Add tasty titbits to the food bowl** whilst your puppy is eating – this will prevent food guarding.
- **Walk your puppy off lead as soon as possible** – the sooner he learns to recall and stay with you the better!
- **Use CD recordings** designed for habituation at home to get your puppy used to many different sounds he will encounter (e.g. sirens, fireworks, thunder).
- **Ensure that good behaviour is rewarded** and not ignored! This will encourage good behaviour to occur more often.

Please discuss with your vet the vaccination of your puppy and dog throughout its life, the important infectious diseases and how you can help your dog remain healthy and happy.

For further information on canine behaviour issues, visit the website of the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors:
www.apbc.org.uk

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PUPPY SOCIALISATION AND VACCINATION

Finding the balance...



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What is socialisation?

The experiences of young puppies affect their brain development. Therefore, puppyhood experiences significantly influence the behaviour of adult dogs. Socialisation is the process whereby a puppy learns to recognise and respond to different stimuli such as other animals, people and the environment.

The importance of socialisation

Fear, anxiety and aggression are common issues related to poor socialisation. Socialisation and appropriate exposure to stimuli are essential for the proper behavioural development of a puppy. As early experiences affect the 'wiring' of the brain, behavioural problems due to inappropriate socialisation can be difficult, if not impossible, to reverse.

The "sensitive period"

To be effective, your puppy's socialisation must be carried out during the "sensitive period", which starts at about 3 weeks of age and ends around 12 weeks of age. Experiences, either good or bad, during this period can have a profound effect on the puppy's behavioural development.

It is therefore vital for puppies to experience many different people, dogs and situations; both with their breeder and as soon as they are adopted by their new family.

It is vital to source your puppy from a responsible breeder who has provided puppies with plenty of diverse experiences prior to re-homing. If this has not been the case it is even more important to adopt your puppy before 8 weeks of age and provide an adequate breadth of experiences before they are 12 weeks of age.

How to socialise your puppy

While it is good for a puppy to have lots of interaction with people, dogs and environments they are familiar with, this is not enough, variety and novelty are more important. Puppies must be exposed to:

- Different people – adults, children, toddlers.
- Different dogs – various breeds and personalities.
- Different animals
- Different experiences
- Different locations
- Different sounds

Ensure that EVERY new experience is a good one.

It is vital that puppies remain relaxed so that they are able to learn an appropriate response. If you see signs of fear* then make the situation less scary for them and give them time to adjust.

The points listed above are just a general guide. Please speak to your vet for further information and advice.

* Signs of fear include holding the ears back, tension over forehead, tucked in tail, attempts to move away or lean away, wide staring eyes, shaking, crouching, lowering of the head



Vaccination

Dogs can and do become seriously ill or die from infectious diseases that could have been prevented through being correctly vaccinated.

Vaccination is the most effective way to protect your pet against these serious diseases, which include:

- Canine Parvovirus
- Canine Distemper Virus
- Canine Adenovirus
- Canine Parainfluenza Virus
- Leptospirosis

Maternally Derived Immunity

In the first weeks of life, puppies are normally protected against disease by antibodies (immunity) from their mother's milk. This is known as Maternally Derived Immunity. This immunity decreases over time and has usually disappeared by approximately 12 weeks of age. Vaccination is then needed to protect your puppy against disease.

As well as protecting the puppy, this maternally derived immunity can interfere with the response to vaccination, so it is important to wait until this has dropped to a level which allows effective vaccination.

Why not just finish the vaccination course early?

While early vaccination is possible in some puppies, many will not respond adequately to vaccination until they are older, due to interference from maternally derived immunity.

As the sensitive period for socialisation starts from 3 weeks of age, socialisation needs to start before the vaccination course begins/ends, even if the vaccination course is finished before 12 weeks.