

Balancing socialisation benefits for puppies with disease risk

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Socialising puppies is essential for raising a well-adjusted, confident and resilient dog. There is a critical period for puppies to socialise with other dogs, other animals, people and the environment.

Formally called the socialisation period, this critical period is between around 3 to 14 weeks of age (with some individual and breed variation). This period overlaps with the time when puppies are receiving their vaccinations for potentially fatal diseases (such as parvovirus), raising concerns about disease risks vs potential benefits from socialising them.

Puppies that are exposed to different stimuli such as other dogs, people, sounds, and novel situations in a positive way are much more likely to be friendly adult dogs. We need to balance these benefits with potential disease risks due to incomplete vaccination (puppy booster vaccinations are usually completed by 16 weeks of age). To try and balance the significant benefits of early puppy socialisation, there are a number of strategies we can use.

- Enrol puppies in socialisation classes that require proof of vaccination
- Arrange play dates with vaccinated dogs in a safe area
- Ensure the environment is safe, avoiding high dog traffic areas such as public parks or dog parks
- Introduce your puppy at home to novel people, other pets, sounds and normal household situations in a calm, controlled positive way.
- Discuss the relative risk of the diseases with your vet in your local area. For many areas, the relative disease risks are extremely low.

Overall, we try and balance the disease risk with the future mental well-being of your dog, and appropriate socialisation will help your puppy develop into a mentally balanced dog.

