

The Dilemma of Socialization and Immunity

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Puppy socialization is the process of learning how to comfortably participate in human society. The socialization period is when puppies are most accepting of new experiences. It occurs between 3 and 12 weeks of age. During this period we need to expose the puppy to other dogs, people, sights, smells, sounds, etc., in a way that is comfortable for the puppy. This is how a puppy learns to properly respond to the stresses life will throw at him or her. A great way to help socialize a puppy is through puppy classes such as Saint Paul Dog Training Club's Puppy Einstein classes. Without adequate socialization, dogs can grow up with behavior problems such as fearfulness or aggression. Whether participating in obedience or agility or a walk around the block, socialization is essential to creating a confident and well-rounded dog.

Puppyhood is a time when every aspect of the dog is developing, including the immune system. Antibodies are a part of the immune system that protect against disease. Immediately after birth, puppies receive antibodies in the milk from their mothers. But these maternal antibodies gradually degrade and are gone by about 10 weeks of age. For a more durable resistance to disease, we need the puppy's immune system to generate its own antibodies. That is the purpose of a vaccine. Vaccines stimulate the puppy's immune system to create antibodies that typically will last for years. While maternal antibodies initially protect the puppy from disease, they also prevent the vaccines from having their full effect. So to minimize gaps in protection, we need to continue vaccinating the puppy while the maternal antibodies fade away. That is why veterinarians vaccinate puppies multiple times until he or she is at least 14 weeks of age.

The socialization period occurs while the immune system is still developing. The dilemma we face is that if we wait until the puppy has full immunity from disease, we will miss the socialization period. Veterinary behaviorists agree that the necessity of socialization greatly outweighs the small risk of disease. SPDTC has implemented common-sense measures that facilitate socialization while keeping the risk of infection very low. We conduct puppy classes on easily cleaned surfaces that are regularly sanitized. Also, we require puppies to have received one vaccine and deworming prior to the first class and to be participating in a vaccination protocol along with your veterinarian. Just as you would with a toddler, please keep your puppy home if he or she is coughing or has diarrhea. Be sure to bring your veterinary records to the first class. By taking these steps we can ensure your puppy grows up to be a healthy and happy dog.

A sample vaccine protocol is shown in Table 1. Please talk with your veterinarian to develop a plan that is appropriate for you and your puppy.

Table 1: Vaccine protocol, as recommended by American Animal Hospital Association

| Initial Puppy Vaccine | Puppy Boosters | Final Puppy Vaccine | 1st Booster as Adult | Adult Boosters |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Core Vaccine (Distemper virus+Adenovirus+Parvovirus) | | | | |
| 6-8 weeks old | every 3-4 weeks | between 14 & 16 weeks | 1 year after initial vaccines | every 3 years |
| Kennel Cough Vaccine | | | | |
| 6-8 weeks old | na | na | 1 year after initial vaccine | every 1 year |
| Rabies Vaccine | | | | |
| after 12 weeks old | na | na | 1 year after initial vaccine | every 3 years |