

# Current recommendations for **Puppy Socialisation**



Just like children, it is very important that puppies have positive experiences when they are young so that they grow and develop into well-balanced, confident and friendly companions.

**Dr E.L. Flint** (MSc, BVSc, MANCVS, PhD) **outlines some advice on how to achieve this:**

The timing of socialisation is critically important and needs to occur between 3 weeks and 12 weeks of age.

## **The critical ages for a puppy's development are:**

- 3-5 weeks: Socialisation with other dogs (predominantly while they are still in the litter).
- 5-12 weeks: Exposure to humans and environmental stimuli.
- 8-12 weeks: A fear sensitivity age; it is extremely important that experiences are positive.

## **The home environment**

- Please do not keep your new puppy isolated; they need positive experiences with people from a very early age.
- Puppies need to be gradually introduced to their new environment, both social and physical, as soon as possible after settling into their new home.
- Puppies can go out in the car to gain more exposure to the outside world and to learn to accept and enjoy car travel.
- Encourage visitors to the house but ask them to leave shoes at the door.
- Once introduced, puppies should be gradually exposed to household noises at a low level; such as vacuum cleaners, lawnmowers, television and stereos.
- Make these experiences positive by playing with the puppy and offering treats; these things may be new for the puppy as they may not have experienced them with the breeder.

## **Puppy school**

- This is a good idea as it broadens the puppy's experience and allows exposure to different people, including children, and to other breeds which often look totally different to the puppy's littermates.
- Ideally start within the first week of ownership if possible.

## **Pheromones**

These can help puppies settle quickly into their new home, cope with new experiences, and have also been shown to accelerate learning. They come as diffusers or collars and are available from your veterinarian. Please ask your veterinarian for advice.

## **Socialisation and risk of disease**

The need for socialisation must be balanced with the need to protect puppies from exposure to disease. Thanks to vaccination, the incidence of infectious disease in dogs in New Zealand is low in most areas.

## **Vaccination**

Talk to your veterinarian about vaccination. The age at which your puppy will finish its vaccination course will depend on a number of factors including breed, lifestyle and which vaccines are used.

### **General Recommendations:**

- Puppies that have had at least one vaccination will benefit from attending puppy school at their veterinary clinic.
- After the second vaccination puppies may walk in areas such as the beach at low tide on the clean sand and play with other vaccinated dogs.
- Avoid public parks and designated dog parks until after the final vaccination, as these areas could be contaminated with, for example, parvovirus.

## **Regional variation**

Risk to puppies in regions where dogs are well contained and thoroughly vaccinated is very small. There are areas which have a higher risk factor, so please check with your veterinarian about which areas are considered high risk, i.e. have had recent cases of infectious diseases, and be guided by their recommendations.

Protecting your puppy from disease is important, but socialisation is equally important. In most areas the risk of a puppy on a vaccination programme contracting an infectious disease is small. The risk of a puppy developing behavioural problems due to lack of socialisation in the first twelve weeks of life is relatively high. This can negatively impact not only the enjoyment the adult dog may experience, but the lifelong relationship with the human family and community.