

Vet Group Issues Puppy Socialization Guidelines

Early exposure to other animals and people may prevent fear aggression.

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The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior has released a position statement on the importance of early socialization in puppies starting before the first set of vaccines is complete.

Although many veterinarians recommend pets be kept away from possible germs until their vaccine series is complete, AVSAB maintains that this is an ideal time for puppies to get familiar with other animals and people.

“Puppies go through a sensitive period of socialization when they are uniquely prepared to benefit from exposure to social opportunities,” said E. Kathryn Meyer, VMD, president of AVSAB. “From the time the owner adopts the puppy until 3 to 4 months of age, it is critical that the owner get the puppy out to meet other animals and people, and experience many different kinds of environments.”

Not having early socialization may cause the puppies to develop fear of unfamiliar people, dogs, objects, and environment, which may later develop into fear aggression, according to AVSAB.

“These puppies may also fail to develop coping mechanisms and grow up into dogs that are unable to adapt to new situations,” Meyer said.

The puppy guidelines, available at www.avsabonline.org, state that puppies can start puppy socialization classes as early as 7-8 weeks of age. In general, they should receive a minimum of one set of vaccines at least seven days prior to the first class as well as a first deworming. In addition, puppies should not show signs of illness during the classes and should be kept up-to-date on vaccines throughout the class.