

Vaccinating Your Puppy

Puppy vaccinations are necessary for a healthy life.

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Owning a puppy can be a wonderful and rewarding experience, but it's also a lifelong commitment to the health and safety of your new family member. The preventive care you provide early in puppyhood will help ensure good health and a better quality of life for your puppy. Proper immunizations are vital to this care.

Keeping your puppy healthy is a combination of a preventive health program, common sense and a good relationship with your veterinarian. Your veterinarian will help customize the best vaccination and parasite control for your new puppy. The vaccines that are best for your puppy are influenced by where you live and the lifestyle of your dog. For example, dogs in frequent contact with other dogs may have a different vaccine protocol over the course of their lives than a dog that never leaves the yard.

Before your puppy reaches 6 months of age, it has not yet had all of its vaccines, so it may not have developed immunity to some potentially life-threatening doggie diseases. During this time, it's crucial that you avoid taking your puppy to high-volume dog-traffic areas, such as dog parks, parks and beaches.

All About Antibodies

Puppies receive antibodies (proteins that fight against disease) from their mothers in utero (in the womb), as well as through the colostrum, which is the milk the mother produces within the first 24 to 72 hours of giving birth. The antibodies that puppies receive from the colostrum can give them a level of protection against disease that may almost equal the mother's.

These antibodies help protect the puppy from diseases (called passive immunity), but they do wear off over time. This is where vaccines come in. Vaccines contain small amounts specific antigens (foreign protein associated with a disease or virus) that trigger your puppy's immune system to produce antibodies against a particular disease.

The best strategy is to vaccinate the puppy during a window of time when the maternal antibodies are waning. A vaccine will not be effective until the maternal antibodies have worn off. If the puppy is vaccinated too soon or too often, the vaccine and the maternal antibody can actually cancel out each other's protection, causing a vaccination failure.