

AT WHAT AGE SHOULD YOUR PUPPY ATTEND PUPPY CLASSES?

Luvk9s Dog Training is a strong proponent of early socialization.

The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior states that "the primary and most important time for puppy socialization is the first three months of life. During this time puppies should be exposed to as many new people, animals, stimuli and environments as can be achieved safely and without causing overstimulation manifested as excessive fear, withdrawal or avoidance behavior. For this reason, the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior believes that it should be the standard of care for puppies to receive such socialization before they are fully vaccinated.

Because the first three months are the period when sociability outweighs fear, this is the primary window of opportunity for puppies to adapt to new people, animals, and experiences. Incomplete or improper socialization during this important time can increase the risk of behavioral problems later in life including fear, avoidance, and/or aggression. Behavioral problems are the greatest threat to the owner-dog bond. In fact, behavioral problems are the number one cause of relinquishment to shelters. Behavioral issues, not infectious diseases, are the number one cause of death for dogs under three years of age.

While puppies' immune systems are still developing during these early months, the combination of maternal immunity, primary vaccination, and appropriate care makes the risk of infection relatively small compared to the chance of death from a behavior problem.

Veterinarians specializing in behavior recommend that owners take advantage of every safe opportunity to expose young puppies to the great variety of stimuli that they will experience in their lives. Enrolling in puppy classes prior to three months of age can be an excellent means of improving training, strengthening the human-animal bond, and socializing puppies in an environment where risk of illness can be minimized."

The veterinarian we work with suggests the following regarding vaccinations:

"A puppy should have a minimum of two DHPP shots before being around other dogs but that in of itself shouldn't be the ultimate deciding factor if the dog is safe or

not to be in the class. First shots should be given at 6 weeks with second being given again at 8-9 weeks old, however that does not give them adequate protection into adulthood. The vaccine should be given every 2-3 weeks starting at 6 weeks and one needs to be given AFTER 12 weeks old. We typically do 6, 8, 10, 12 and 14 but depending on the age we first see a dog we may wind up only getting a 12 and 14 weeks shot into them. We typically don't give Bordetella vaccines to dogs until they're 12 weeks old or older, BUT if they're going to be in a class environment before that time, then they should get the vaccination before they start the class."

The AVSAB (American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior) notes that "each puppy should have up-to-date vaccinations and be disease and parasite free before entering the class. Where possible, classes should be held on surfaces that are easily cleaned and disinfected (e.g., indoor environments). Visits to dog parks or other areas that are not sanitized and/or are highly trafficked by dogs of unknown vaccination or disease status should be avoided."

Note that puppy classes at Ball Ground Hounds are held outdoors in their fenced-in (grass) courtyard. This area is open for use to Ball Ground Hounds customers when classes are not being held. The courtyard is checked regularly and kept picked up and clean.

To read the AVSAB POSITION STATEMENT ON PUPPY SOCIALIZATION in its entirety, go to <https://avsab.org/resources/position-statements/>