

Which is more important: getting my new puppy socialized, or getting him fully vaccinated, first?

Puppy Training Classes

Training classes are a great way for families to bond with their dogs, while learning to curb bad behavior. Puppy training classes are especially helpful in teaching dogs to listen and obey, even when distractions are calling. Keep in mind, any dog can develop behavior issues-even if he is raised correctly. But dogs that are well-socialized have the best chance of being friendly, agreeable pets. Unfortunately, most socialization activities - especially those conducted at a training class - carry some risk for disease exposure.



Young Immune Systems

Puppies actually get some antibodies from their mothers, before they are born and throughout the nursing stage. These maternal antibodies linger in their systems until around 14 to 16 weeks of age. While not foolproof, maternal antibodies do provide some protection against serious diseases like canine parvovirus (CPV), commonly known as "parvo," and canine distemper.

Preventative Medicine

When you bring him home, your new puppy may have already received one vaccine and a dose or two of worm medication, but probably little else for preventative medical care. Vaccines and preventative medicine are very important at this age, as young dogs begin to encounter all of the diseases of the outside world. But puppies can't be fully vaccinated as soon as they leave their mothers. Their immune systems still too immature.

Potential Risks

As you're waiting for your dog to receive all his vaccines, there are several potential risks you can watch for. The most common diseases for puppies to catch are upper respiratory infections, kennel cough, intestinal parasites, and skin parasites. It is possible to contract one of these even at the most reputable puppy class, or while walking in the nicest neighborhood. Common infections are usually very treatable. More serious diseases and infections exist, but they are much less common.

Early Socialization vs. Full Vaccination: The Verdict

The overwhelming consensus among experts is that the importance of puppy socialization trumps the need to be fully vaccinated. Yes, your puppy may catch something at puppy class, but chances are good it will be very treatable. Keep bringing your puppy for vaccine appointments, according to your veterinarian's recommended schedule. If your puppy shows any signs of illness (coughing, sneezing, diarrhea), skip puppy class and call your veterinarian.

Meanwhile, enjoy these early weeks of getting to know your new family member. Take your puppy to the kindergarten; stroll through the neighborhood; visit a pet-friendly beach. Your veterinarian fully supports you!