

New Puppy Primer

Bolton Veterinary Hospital

Have you just adopted your first puppy, or maybe this is just the first puppy you've had in a long time? There's a lot to plan for and educate yourself about, and this article will guide you through it.

Where to Find a Puppy

Haven't got your new puppy yet? Of course there are loads of happy, healthy young dogs looking for homes from rescue groups or shelters. Even if you're looking for a specific breed or type of dog, with a little time and effort, you can probably still find a rescue or stray to adopt. Check out [petfinder.com](https://www.petfinder.com) for a start, or check out [our page of local rescue and adoption groups](#). Ask the rescue group how they find the dogs they offer for adoption, and if they have been checked out by a veterinarian and vaccinated prior to adoption.



Considering a breeder? Make sure your breeder of choice has the breed's (and each puppy's) best interests in mind. A truly reputable breeder is likely to breed only a few litters per year, often restricts themselves to just one or two specific breeds overall, and will screen their adult dogs for signs of breed-related conditions such as hip dysplasia, orthopedic disorders, cardiac diseases, ocular diseases, and others. It isn't just a matter of the parents appearing healthy at that moment - many of these conditions do not become apparent until a dog is older (perhaps past breeding age), so it is important to screen dogs before breeding them to be sure they represent the best possible candidates for breeding. The [Orthopedic Foundation for Animals](#) maintains a list of what health-related conditions each breed should be screened for (not only orthopedic issues). Check that your breeder is aware of this list!

Diet

There are many suitable choices of diets to feed a new puppy, and there is no single best choice for every dog. Puppies under one year of age should be fed a diet labeled for puppies or for "all life stages." Dogs who are expected to grow to over 50 pounds should ideally be fed a "large breed puppy" formula, to assure they grow at a steady and even pace and help avoid future orthopedic problems. You might be interested in reading our blog post on [what to feed your pet](#) for more information on this topic.

Vaccinations

Your new puppy may come to you after he has had his first round of vaccines, but is likely to need at least a few additional vaccinations. Some are considered "core" or required by law, while others are lifestyle-dependent or optional. Here are the vaccines we consider for each new puppy:

- **Rabies** - This is a core vaccination, and required by law. A puppy is old enough to receive this vaccine when they are 12 weeks of age.
- **Distemper/Parvo combination** - This is a core vaccination, administered once every 3-4 weeks until a puppy is 16 weeks old. **Distemper** is a viral disease that can cause respiratory, gastrointestinal, and neurologic disease. The disease is often fatal, and if a puppy survives, they can still have long-term consequences of the illness. **Parvovirus** ("parvo" for short) is highly contagious and can cause life-threatening diarrhea and vomiting. The distemper/parvo combination is sometimes called a "four-way" or a "five-way" vaccine, and may include protection against a few other (milder) illnesses too.
- **Leptospirosis** - This disease is caused by a bacteria shed in the urine of wild mammals. It can continue to survive and remain infectious in water or moist soil, and illness can cause liver and kidney failure. The disease is even contagious to people. A dog who is going to swim in a lake, may drink out of a puddle in a wooded area, or who lives in a yard that deer, raccoons, or other wild mammals wander through should probably be vaccinated against **Leptospirosis**.
- **Lyme Disease** - **Lyme** is spread by a bacteria that can be introduced through tick bites. A dog who is at risk of exposure to ticks should certainly be protected via a **flea/tick preventative**, as ticks spread more diseases than just Lyme! The Lyme vaccination can be given as an additional measure of protection.
- **Bordetella** - This is the most common agent associated with **Kennel Cough**, a contagious respiratory infection that causes a cough that may last for weeks. It is not a very serious disease, but most kennels, doggie day care facilities, and many groomers will require that dogs who visit them must be vaccinated against Bordetella.



Deworming

Your new puppy may have already been given a dewormer by the breeder or rescue group, but repeat treatments with a dewormer and/or testing a stool sample to check for parasites is recommended.

External Parasite Preventatives

Prevention of **heartworm disease** via a product such as Heartgard, Iverhart, Tri-Heart, Revolution, Advantage Multi, Sentinel, Interceptor, or others is strongly recommended. Most therapies are a once-monthly soft-chew or pill, though a few are topical products (applied as a drop between the shoulders).

Prevention of **fleas** is important for most dogs, as even those who do not spend a lot of time outdoors may pick them up from another dog they meet out on a walk, while at the groomer's, at the dog park, and so on. It is much easier to prevent a flea infestation from occurring than to resolve one that is already going on in your household. Fleas can cause anemia if they are present in large numbers, and ingestion of a single flea can introduce **tapeworms** to a dog's intestine.

Prevention of **ticks** is important for dogs who spend a fair amount of time outdoors, live in a property bordering woods, will be hiking outside on trails, or even just live in an area where ticks and tickborne diseases are common. A vaccination can protect against Lyme, but not against any of the other diseases ticks carry (such as Anaplasma, Ehrlichia, Babesia, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, and others).

Visit our **blog article on flea control** for a discussion and comparison of several different flea and/or tick preventative products.

Pet Insurance

Whether you decide pet insurance is the right choice to help protect your new puppy, or if you would prefer to save up your own emergency fund, it is simply important to have a plan in case of an emergency medical expense. There is a complete **discussion and comparison of pet insurance** providers on our blog, too.

Microchip Identification

A microchip is the only completely secure and permanent way to identify your pet if they ever get lost. A microchip with a unique ID number is implanted under the skin, usually around the shoulders. It hurts a bit more than a vaccine, so while it can be done at any time, it is generally preferred to place a microchip while a pet is already under anesthesia for a spay or neuter. If your pet is found and scanned for a chip, the ID number will link them to your veterinarian, your home address, and any other information you register with the chip company.

Spaying and Neutering

Rescue puppies are sometimes already spayed or neutered before they are adopted, but in other cases we can plan for the ideal time to spay or neuter a pet. In general, it is best to wait until a dog is done growing to spay or neuter them. Depending on breed and size, this may be from 8 to 16 months of age.

Why do we decide to spay or neuter? In addition to population control and reducing behaviors such as roaming off, urine-marking, and/or getting into fights with other dogs, there are a handful of disease conditions that can be reduced or eliminated by spaying or neutering. Spaying (especially before the first or second heat cycle) reduces the incidence of mammary cancer later in life. It eliminates the chance of cancers of the reproductive tract, as well as the development of pyometra (an infection of the uterus). While testicular cancers are not common in intact male dogs, infection or cancer of the prostate can be, and neutering substantially reduces this risk.

Training & Socialization

Training your puppy can include formal puppy socials, puppy kindergarten, and even private training lessons in addition to your own efforts at home. Bolton Vet hosts puppy socials as well as puppy kindergarten year-round. Locally, Mellow Mutt in Manchester, Tails-U-Win in Manchester, and Faithful Friends K9 Academy in Ellington also offer training classes. If you're in search of a dog training book as a guide, check out the following:

[How to Behave So Your Dog Behaves](#) by Sophia Yin

Have you picked out a training treat yet? The ideal choice is something that comes in very small pieces (or can be broken up into very small pieces), tastes and smells REALLY good, and is not greasy or fatty (if it makes your hands slimy, it's not a good choice). Many dog treats will be labeled especially as puppy training treats.

One aspect of training that most puppy owners are happy to accept some helpful tips on is housetraining. Extremely close supervision is essential to successful housetraining, and training your puppy to spend their resting time in a crate is a foundation for housetraining. A puppy can be expected to hold their bladder while awake for the same number of hours as they are aged in months (for example, a three month old puppy can hold it for three hours). If you are having trouble house-training, follow these guidelines:

- Overnight, puppy sleeps in a crate.
- First thing in the morning, take puppy QUICKLY and DIRECTLY outside to pee/poop.
- Stand quietly outside waiting for puppy to do his business. No playing, no touring the yard, no distractions.
- Once puppy goes, he "earns" some playtime (inside or outside).
- Continue to closely watch puppy once you are back inside. Keep him on his leash indoors if needed to keep him from wandering away from you.
- If you are not DIRECTLY supervising puppy, he should go back into his crate.
- If more than 30 minutes of free-access playtime has gone by, either go outside until puppy urinates again, OR it is time to go back in the crate.
- Every time puppy comes out of the crate, take him QUICKLY and DIRECTLY outside to pee/poop.

"Socialization" doesn't just mean social interaction with other dogs. Help your puppy become accustomed to the things that will become daily life experiences: meeting other dogs, meeting new people, interacting with children, having their teeth brushed, having their nails clipped, leaning not to be afraid of the vacuum cleaner, etc. And start early!! Puppies are most impressionable between 8 and 14 weeks of age. Ideally, doggie play-dates should be set up with other dogs who are known to be in good health and up-to-date on vaccinations. Formal puppy social classes often require that all participants have proof of up-to-date vaccinations and/or a recent wellness appointment.



Safety Considerations

As an emergency hospital, we know all about the trouble that's out there for a puppy to get into! Here are a few items to keep in mind when puppy-proofing your home:

- Human medications: While some human medications are safe for dogs at an appropriate dose, others can be quite toxic. Never let your pet have access to painkillers (even over-the-counter drugs like Advil, Motrin, Tylenol, Aleve, etc.), sleep aids, steroid pills or creams, or any human prescription medication.
- Toxic foods: Keep chocolate, alcoholic beverages, sugar-free gum, grapes and raisins, onions, garlic, and anything especially greasy or fatty away from your dog.
- Interactions with other pets: Your other furry family members might not be as excited as you are about a new puppy! Make sure your pets' interactions are closely supervised until you are sure they are getting along well together.

Good luck with your new puppy and we'll see you at your next visit!!

The original web version of this article contains active links to relevant articles on puppy care, insurance, flea/tick products, and each of the infectious diseases listed. Visit boltonvet.com to find "New Puppy Primer" in the right side column, and scroll through our other blog articles too!

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