

# Common-sense measures to protect your dog, yourself and others in canine social settings

- Consult your veterinarian about the best preventive program for your dog(s), including vaccinations, heartworm prevention and parasite prevention (deworming and regular stool checks).
- Do not let your puppy come into contact with other dogs' stool.
- Make sure you keep your dog's vaccinations up to date so it is fully protected from disease. Consult your veterinarian about the best vaccination schedule for your dog.
- If your dog has a disease or it is receiving steroids or other medications that suppress its immune system and decrease its resistance to infection, you should not take it to dog gatherings without first consulting your veterinarian.
- If your dog is ill, do not take it to a dog gathering.
- Do not pet or handle a dog that appears unhealthy. If contact with an ill dog cannot be avoided, wash your hands thoroughly and change clothes (or cover your clothes) before handling your own dog or another apparently healthy dog.



- Clean up after your own dog(s) and place stool in appropriate containers.
- Follow the rules and guidelines associated with the event or area.
- Teach your dog good leash manners and obedience. If your dog does not behave well around other dogs or people, you should not take it to dog gatherings.
- Remain in sight of your dog and be aware of its behavior while at a dog gathering. Remember, your dog and its behavior are your responsibility in these situations. If your dog shows signs of aggression, fear or illness, remove your dog from the situation and consider leaving the site altogether.
- Avoid contact with dogs that appear aggressive and report their presence and behavior to the proper authorities.
- Before your children accompany you and your pet(s) to a dog gathering, make sure they are aware of safety around dogs, and educate yourself and them about [dog bite prevention](#). While present at the dog gathering, monitor your children closely to make sure they are safe and protected from harm (injury, bites, etc.).
- Do not allow your dog to have contact with any wildlife. This includes rabbits, squirrels and other wildlife that may be present in areas frequented by dogs.
- If you observe wildlife or other animals acting in an abnormal way, do not approach the animal, do not allow your dog to come in contact with the animal, and call the appropriate authorities.
- Do not swim in water frequented by dogs (e.g., in dog parks, etc.)
- Avoid letting dogs drink standing water or water that is obviously not fresh. If possible, bring water for yourself and your dog to the dog gathering.
- Take appropriate measures to reduce your risk of tick and mosquito bites, including the following:
  - Wear light-colored clothing.
  - Wear long sleeves and pants (where practical) and tuck the pant leg hems into socks to prevent ticks from crawling up your legs from the ground.
  - Use insect repellent.
  - When practical, avoid being outside during times of high insect activity.
- Check your dog for ticks after any outside dog gatherings and remove the tick(s) as soon as possible. Prompt removal of ticks is very important because it lessens the chance of disease transmission from the tick to your pet.
  - Remove ticks by carefully using tweezers to firmly grip the tick as close to the pet's skin as possible and gently and steadily pulling the tick free without twisting it or crushing the tick during removal.
  - Do not attempt to smother the tick with alcohol or petroleum jelly, or apply a hot match to it, as this may cause the tick to regurgitate saliva into the

wound and increase the risk of disease if the tick is infected.

- Crushing, twisting or jerking the tick out of the skin while its head is still buried could result in leaving the tick's mouth parts in your pet's skin; this can cause a reaction and may become infected.
- After removing the tick, crush it in a napkin or tissue to avoid contact with tick fluids that can carry disease.

Allowing your dog to interact with other dogs can provide good opportunities for exercise and socialization that can help your dog's mental and physical well-being. However, these situations are also associated with some risk to dogs and their owners. By using good common sense, you can minimize the risks while still providing for your dog's well-being.

## A note about puppy socialization and the risk of disease

The [socialization period](#) for puppies, which takes place from 3-14 weeks of age, is critical for a dog's behavioral development. During this time positive experiences with other dogs, people, noises and activities can reduce the likelihood of fearful behaviors, such as aggression and phobias, later in the dog's life. Puppies that are not properly socialized are more likely to develop behavioral problems that can make them unsuitable pets and increase the chances their owners will relinquish them to shelters.



This socialization period overlaps a period of vulnerability to disease, including canine parvovirus and canine distemper virus infection. Puppies need socialization with other dogs, but those dogs must be well vaccinated and healthy.

To fully protect your puppy from canine parvovirus, the last dose of the parvovirus vaccine must be at 14-16 weeks of age, regardless of the number of doses given at an earlier age. Until your puppy is fully protected, avoid taking it to dog parks or other areas where it has uncontrolled exposure to dogs with questionable or unknown vaccination histories.

Having a puppy take part in socialization classes can offer excellent opportunities to properly socialize puppies but there is a disease risk. To reduce the risk, puppies in the classes should be of similar age and vaccination history and should be examined and found to be healthy by a veterinarian prior to starting classes. Proper sanitation (including immediate cleanup of 'accidents') during the classes helps provide additional protection from infection. The puppies' first vaccine should be administered at least 7 days prior to the first class. Puppies with signs of illness (diarrhea, coughing, fever, etc.) should not attend puppy socialization classes until they have recovered from their illness.

If you allow your puppy to interact with dogs belonging to family or friends, make sure the dogs have been appropriately vaccinated and are adequately socialized to avoid bad experiences that could have negative long-term consequences to your puppy's behavior. Similarly, if you own an older dog and plan to introduce a puppy into your house, make sure the older dog is adequately vaccinated.

It is important to understand that it is not until 7-10 days after the last vaccination at 14-16 weeks of age that the risk of infection is very low and you can increase the puppy's introduction and socialization with all dogs.

## See also:

- [Dogs' social lives and disease risks](#)
- [Dog bite prevention](#)
- [Socialization of dogs and cats](#)

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