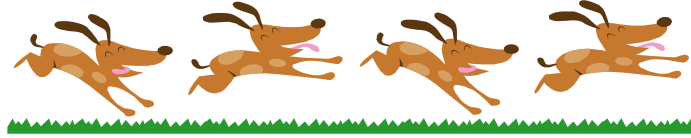


Puppies and the Dog Park



Lucky you! You have a brand new puppy who is absolutely the cutest puppy in the world. You want to do all the right things to ensure your new puppy has a long and happy life. You've started housetraining, you've introduced your puppy to a crate, you've bought the best puppy food, and you're providing lots of love and affection. Now, you want to start socializing your puppy so she'll get along with other dogs and people. It seems like the local dog park would be the perfect place to begin socializing your young pup. Right?

Wrong! Wrong! Wrong! **Please don't bring your young puppy to the dog park.** Even though everyone in the dog park loves puppies and will ooh and aah over your young pup, a dog park is an unforgivably dangerous place until your puppy is at least 16 weeks old (4 months).

Many diseases, such as distemper, parvovirus, parainfluenza, and adenovirus, which might make an older dog sick, can be fatal to a young puppy. There is no guarantee that every dog in a public dog park is healthy or has had all the recommended vaccinations. Many viruses which are found in an infected dog's urine or feces can remain alive in the soil for months.

Before your puppy is 16 weeks old, he or she will **not** have had all of the vaccinations required to protect him from these potentially fatal diseases. Most vaccines are given as a series of shots from the time puppies are 4 weeks old until they are 12 to 14 weeks old. Furthermore, the rabies vaccination, which is required by law for all dogs, is not given until a puppy is 12 weeks old. Additionally, most veterinarians recommend waiting for one or two weeks after the last booster shot before exposing puppies to any location where these viruses could be present. (This includes dog parks, pet stores, kennels, and doggy day care centers. Even the area outside your vet's office can be dangerous for a puppy.) If the shelter or breeder from whom you adopted your puppy said your dog is "current" on all shots, that just means your puppy has received the initial series of vaccines appropriate for its age – your puppy still requires additional booster shots from your new veterinarian.

Even though you shouldn't take your puppy to a dog park, there are still many safe ways to begin socializing your puppy. Most dog behaviorists believe the period from 3 weeks to 16 weeks is critical to a dog's development. During this period, you want to let your puppy have a positive experience with every type of person and environment that you can find. Just don't expose your puppy to any situation in which he might feel threatened. Enroll your puppy in an established puppy class, let your puppy play with dogs that you know are healthy and well socialized, and let him learn that new situations are to be enjoyed. Then, once your dog is old enough to safely visit the dog park, he or she will be ready to happily interact with his new dog park friends.