

Routine Veterinary Care for Your Dog

By Sherry Woodard

Puppies should be seen by a veterinarian at approximately three weeks of age for a physical and a fecal test for intestinal parasites. While you're there, you can talk about what vaccines will be needed in the future, how to prevent disease, when to have spay/neuter surgery done, and how to handle the diet change from mom to meals.

At six to eight weeks, puppies start getting vaccinations. Booster shots are given at three-week intervals; heartworm preventive medication begins (if it's needed in your area). To keep your puppy safe from possible diseases, carry the puppy in your arms when you go in to see the veterinarian. Spay/neuter can be done as early as eight weeks; the puppy must weigh at least two pounds.



At 12 weeks, your puppy should get a parasite test and rabies vaccine. Continue to keep your puppy up off the floor during the visit to the veterinarian. If spay/neuter has not happened yet, it can be scheduled during this visit. At 16 weeks, the veterinarian will administer the third and final set of shots. Now, it's time to show your puppy the world and show off his or her good manners!

After the four-month visit, your dog should be seen annually by your vet for a physical examination, vaccines, parasite test, dental check, and any needed bloodwork or other tests that your veterinarian recommends. Older dogs may need to be seen more often.

Besides taking your dog in for annual checkups, you should also take him or her to see the veterinarian if:

- He is a puppy and is not gaining weight
- She is lethargic, or she is losing or gaining weight
- She seems to be having some discomfort
- You notice a change in his behavior
- You notice a change in her general health – for example, her eyes have lost their brightness or her coat has lost its luster

Remember, regular veterinary care is an essential component of your pet's good health!

Sherry Woodard is the dog training and care consultant at Best Friends. She develops resources and provides consulting services nationally to help achieve Best Friends' No More Homeless Pets mission.