



## CANINE LIFE STAGE: PUPPY

So, you just used the AAHA Canine Life Stage Calculator to determine that your dog is in the puppy stage of life. Congrats! Knowing your dog's life stage helps you provide a lifetime of optimal care for your pooch.

A dog's life can be divided into four stages: puppy, young adult, mature adult, and senior. The stages are based on a dog's maturation and aging process. Because dogs evolve as they mature, they require different approaches to healthcare as they progress from puppy to senior pet. In fact, there are at least 10 health-related factors based on age, size, lifestyle, health status, and breed that your veterinary team regularly assesses to keep your dog healthy, happy, and safe.

When you understand your dog's life stage, you and your veterinary team become partners in providing your dog with an individualized healthcare approach to every veterinary visit. The end result: a lifetime of optimal care your dog needs and deserves!

### PUPPY CARE 101

A puppy has different dietary, vaccination, behavioral, and dental care needs than an adult or senior dog. They grow fast and their needs change just as fast. Puppies will have frequent veterinary visits based on where they came from (shelter or breeder), so you and your puppy will get to know your veterinary team well.

Your puppy will get a thorough physical exam during each veterinary visit. Your veterinarian will take your puppy's temperature and check their body condition, skin, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, heart, lungs, gastrointestinal system, urinary system, brain, nerves, bones, muscles, joints, and lymph nodes.

Below are some topics you'll want to discuss with the veterinary team at your visit that are specific for the puppy life stage.



## **YOUR PUPPY'S LIFESTYLE AND SAFETY**

Your puppy wants to run, play, explore, and chew! Talk to your veterinarian about how much exercise your puppy needs and ways to keep your pup safely occupied. “Puppy-proofing” is a must—boredom and puppies is a bad combo! Discuss how to keep your puppy safe by identifying potential hazards inside, outside, and when traveling. Want to know the best way to confine your puppy in your home, car, on a walk, or in the yard? Ask your veterinary team! They are the experts and will be happy to help.

All dogs, regardless of their life stage, have to travel safely and with minimal stress. Call your veterinarian prior to your dog's visit to learn how to acclimate your dog to travel and determine the most effective way to transport them for their visit.

## **INFECTIONS BETWEEN HUMANS AND ANIMALS**

Infections transmitted between humans and animals are called zoonoses. They are transmitted in different ways, such as bites, raw food, and poop, so talk to your veterinary team about disease prevention. It's important to let the veterinary team know if there are children, elderly folks, or immune-compromised family members who may have exposure to your puppy to keep everyone healthy.

## **PUPPY BEHAVIOR**

“Puppyhood” is a BIG chapter in your dog's life book. What you do now will have a profound and lasting effect on your dog's relationship with you, other people, and other animals. There are key priorities at different stages of your puppy's development, including socializing with a wide variety of people, learning bite inhibition, navigating the world at large, and many more. Tell your veterinarian about your puppy's actions. How do they act and play? Do you use a crate as part of your training? Share any concerning behavior you have seen. Many issues can be addressed and corrected with expert advice from your veterinarian. Ask about selecting appropriate trainers, too!

## **YOUR PUPPY'S NUTRITION**

You will find everyone, from pet store employee to breeder, has an opinion about the best food to feed your puppy. The choices can be overwhelming! Veterinarians have the most medical training when it comes to puppy nutrition, so let them help you. Together, you can choose a quality food with targeted nutrition based on your puppy's breed and size. Also, talk to the veterinary team about supplements, feeding schedules, water availability, and establishing a healthy weight range for your pup.

## WORMS AND OTHER PARASITES THAT CAN AFFECT PUPPIES

It is common for puppies to have intestinal parasites (e.g., worms, Giardia, etc.). Early on, your veterinarian will likely prescribe a “dewormer”—a medicine to get rid of the parasites. Your puppy will then start year-round medicine to prevent intestinal parasites. These parasites are found in your puppy’s poop and can be transmitted to humans, so talk to your veterinarian about how to keep everyone in your home safe. Also, be sure to ask about the most effective ways to prevent heartworm, fleas, and ticks.

## VACCINATIONS FOR PUPPIES

Vaccination is a crucial component to preventive medicine in dogs. Vaccinations are given to kick-start your puppy’s immune system against infection before they are exposed to a disease. Several vaccines are administered routinely to dogs as the primary defense against serious infectious illnesses. These “core” vaccines include distemper, adenovirus, parvovirus and +/-parainfluenza (usually packaged as a single vaccine), and rabies. Additional vaccines are needed depending on geographic regions, circumstances, and lifestyle. These are “noncore” vaccines and include bordetella, Lyme disease, influenza, and leptospirosis. Your veterinarian will advise which vaccines are necessary to keep your puppy healthy.

## YOUR PUPPY’S TEETH

Beginning in puppyhood, dogs need good dental care throughout their lives. Your puppy’s mouth sees a lot of action these days. Deciduous teeth (“baby teeth”) come in and fall out, and permanent teeth may be on their way. Your veterinarian will perform a complete oral exam to evaluate the development of your pup’s teeth, gums, and mouth structure. During all this action, your pup also wants to chew on everything! This is the time to talk about acceptable and safe chew toys. Hint: Your hand should not be one of them! Once your puppy’s permanent teeth have grown in, discuss home oral hygiene training with the veterinary team to maximize lifelong health.



## YOUR PUPPY'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

It is recommended that all dogs not intended for deliberate breeding be spayed or neutered. A spay is the surgical removal of both ovaries and the uterus in female dogs. A neuter is the surgical removal of both testicles in male dogs. There are many benefits to spaying or neutering your puppy. Sterilized dogs live longer than those that are not. The timing of when to spay or neuter your puppy is based on factors such as sex and how much your dog is expected to weigh as an adult. Talk to your veterinarian to determine the appropriate timeframe to sterilize your puppy. For those owners who choose to breed, responsible breeding practices should be reviewed.

## BREED-SPECIFIC INFORMATION FOR YOUR PUPPY

The breed of your puppy may make for a great hunter, but it may also mean that they have a higher risk for bone cancer. Learn all about the breed of your puppy, even if they are a mix of breeds. Why? There are breed-specific health concerns that can affect your puppy's quality of life. At your visit, your veterinarian will examine your pup from mouth to tail for any breed-related abnormalities. Consider DNA testing for breed identification in mixed-breed dogs to determine risk factors for breed-specific diseases.

Understanding your puppy's unique needs is the first step to providing a lifetime of care that will lead to a happy and healthy canine companion.

### **Looking for a veterinarian for your puppy?**

Find an AAHA-accredited veterinary practice by using the Hospital Locator at [aaha.org/locate](https://aaha.org/locate).

