

Purdue University's Recommendations for Puppy Class



Rocky Mountain Dog Training

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To Whom It May Concern:

This letter's purpose is to define Purdue University's recommendations for Puppy Class protocols.

The main objectives of puppy classes are exposure and desensitization to potentially frightening stimuli, socialization, and the teaching of appropriate dog-owner interaction. Although simple commands are trained as well, obedience training is not a main objective of puppy classes.

Puppies go through well-defined developmental stages. Puppy classes are designed to utilize the sociability of young puppies. However, the socialization period of dogs ends at around 12-14 weeks of age. Up to that age, puppies can readily learn not to fear new things, and to develop appropriate social behavior. If this opportunity to shape puppy behavior is missed, the puppies are likely to show behavior disturbances later in life. Therefore, in order to maximize the benefits of puppy classes, puppies should be enrolled at 7-10 weeks of age if possible, the sooner the better.

The puppy classes at Purdue University's Animal Behavior Clinic start any time between 7 and 14 weeks of age and at least 10 days after initial vaccination for the Distemper/Parvo combination and Bordatella. We encourage the use of an intranasal Bordatella/Parainfluenza (+/- Adeno) combination and the use of a high-titer, low-passage Parvo vaccination. These should be vaccinations administered after a thorough veterinary exam. Several vaccines are currently on the market, which meet these requirements.

Trainers and veterinarians have had concerns about placing puppies at risk in an environment where they may pick up an infectious disease. As with anything, one must always weigh the risks and benefits. "Puppy cuteness" only lasts so long and many more puppies currently lose their homes due to behavior reasons than die of viral diseases.

We are aware of only one Parvo problem in a puppy preschool class in Minnesota in the early 90's and none since high titer Parvo vaccines gained mainstream use in 1995. There have been no Puppy Class participants infected with Parvo virus in any puppy classes offered at Ohio State or Purdue University. These are both facilities that treat high humane society caseloads and numerous Parvo cases annually. Preliminary investigations underway at the University of Pennsylvania suggest that low-level exposure to pathogens, like what might occur in a clean although not completely sterile environment, may actually promote a "stronger" or more responsive immune system. (Verbal communication with Dr. Karen Overall, dipl. ACVB 1998)

Let's welcome new puppies into our society by showing them what we expect, not dispose of them because we failed to communicate our expectations at a time when the puppies are most impressionable.

Sincerely, Andrew Luescher, D.V.M., PhD.
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