

# First Puppy Visit

Now that you have brought home your new addition, the staff members at La Costa Animal Hospital are here to help you navigate the waters of canine health care.

Fecal examination and deworming: many puppies acquire roundworms (*Toxocara canis*) from their mother; puppies with roundworms may have soft stool or visible adult worms in their stool, but many have no symptoms at all. As roundworms can be spread to people and have very serious consequences in children including blindness, a fecal examination to detect roundworms will be recommended at your puppy's first visit. If roundworms are found, your puppy will receive a pill on the day of his or her first visit, and again two to three weeks later. Puppies may also carry whipworms, hookworms and tapeworms, which a fecal examination can also detect so that appropriate treatment can be started.

Routine preventative care:

Toothbrushing: just like their human family members, dogs do require routine dental care. In dogs that will tolerate daily tooth brushing, this is strongly recommended; a canine toothbrush and toothpaste kit is available at La Costa Animal Hospital.

Vaccines: 'core' vaccines are those that are recommended to all puppies seen at La Costa Animal Hospital; these include the rabies vaccine, the 'distemper' vaccine and the Bordetella vaccine. The **rabies** vaccine is required by law; it is given once at 16 weeks old, then again one year later, then every three years thereafter. The '**distemper (DHPP-C)**' vaccine protects against distemper virus, canine infectious hepatitis (adenovirus), parvovirus, parainfluenza and coronavirus. It is given every three to four weeks from eight weeks old, with the final dose given at 14-16 weeks old; this works out to be three vaccines for most dogs. This vaccine is then repeated annually. The **Bordetella** vaccine protects against *Bordetella bronchiseptica*, a component of kennel cough. This vaccine is given twice, two to four weeks apart, then repeated every six months.

Non-core vaccines are those that are given to certain dogs whose lifestyle warrants them. These include leptospirosis ('lepto'), Lyme disease and rattlesnake. **Leptospirosis** is a bacterium transmitted in the urine of wildlife; in dogs it causes kidney and liver failure and can be transmitted to humans. Dogs at risk of acquiring lepto are those that hike in the forest and swim in or drink from stagnant bodies of water. This vaccine is available as a combination with the distemper vaccine and is given twice, two to four weeks apart, then repeated annually. **Lyme disease** is caused by a bacteria, *Borrelia burgdorferi*; it is transmitted by ticks and in dogs can cause arthritis in multiple joints, fever and kidney failure. Lyme disease is uncommon in southern California, so is only given to dogs that will travel outside of the region. It is given twice, one month apart, then repeated annually. Dogs with a **rattlesnake** vaccine do not need to seek emergency veterinary attention for antivenin treatment if they are bitten by a rattlesnake, but they generally have a less severe reaction to the bite and require a shorter and less-intense treatment course. This vaccine is given to dogs at risk of a rattlesnake bite.

Flea preventatives: flea infestations are unfortunately very common in southern California. As it is far easier to prevent fleas than to treat an infestation, it is recommended that all patients at La Costa Animal Hospital are given flea preventatives year-round. There are many products available to prevent fleas, including collars, sprays, shampoos, spot-ons and oral medications; Drs. Schatzle and Meisner will be happy to discuss these options with you. At La Costa Animal Hospital, the recommended products for dogs are Comfortis® and Trifexis®. These are tablets given orally every month; Comfortis® is a flea preventative only, Trifexis® contains the same flea-killing product as Comfortis® (spinosad) but also prevents heartworms and intestinal worms.

Heartworm preventatives: heartworms are spread by mosquitoes. The larval stage is inoculated into the bloodstream by the female mosquito when she feeds, adult worms reside at the base of the right heart where the heart connects to the lungs. Even though heartworm disease is uncommon in southern California, it is often a deadly disease and treatment carries a high risk of very serious side effects. For these reasons, it is far better to prevent heartworm disease than risk infection. Heartworm preventatives may be oral or topical; again, there are many products available, which Drs. Schatzle and Meisner will be happy to discuss with you. Trifexis®, a tablet given once monthly, also prevents flea infestation and is the product recommended at La Costa Animal Hospital.

It takes seven months for larvae inoculated by the mosquito to become adults; dogs over seven months old must have a negative heartworm test, which tests for adult worms, before starting heartworm preventatives. If a heartworm preventative is given to a dog that has adult heartworms, these worms die off *en masse* and can become lodged in vital parts of the body, blocking blood flow. If your puppy is under seven months old, heartworm preventatives can be started without a heartworm test but a heartworm test will be recommended yearly thereafter.

Spaying/neutering:

*Spaying:* spaying is the surgical removal of a female dog's uterus and ovaries (ovariohysterectomy). This not only prevents pregnancy, but if performed before the first heat at 5-6 months old much reduces the risk of breast cancer. It also prevents pyometra, an infection of the uterus that requires emergency surgery. Drs. Schtazle and Meisner will be happy to discuss with you the appropriate time to spay your female dog.

*Neutering:* neutering is the removal of a male dog's testicles. It prevents a male dog from impregnating females, and also dramatically reduces a male dog's testosterone level. Testosterone drives many undesirable male behaviors, including wandering, aggression and urine marking. There is no perfect time to neuter a male dog; if neutered late, testosterone-driven behavior may become habit and may not be reversed by neutering. It is appropriate to neuter small and medium-breed dogs around the time of or slightly before puberty (five to six months old), and this is recommended in all dogs with access to unsprayed females. However, in large and giant-breed dogs neutering at 12-18 months old may reduce the risk of bone cancer. Again, Drs. Schatzle and Meisner will be happy to discuss with you the appropriate time to neuter your male dog.

Hip dysplasia testing (large and giant breeds only): early detection of hip dysplasia allows for surgical intervention to reduce or even prevent the painful long-term consequences of this disease. To test for hip dysplasia, hip x-rays and manipulation of the hip called an Ortolani test are performed under sedation or general anesthesia. As surgical intervention is best done before six months old, large and giant breed dogs should have hip dysplasia testing done prior to this age. It is often convenient to do this at the time of your pet's spay or neuter as both require sedation.

Retained deciduous teeth: puppy teeth should not be present at the same time as adult teeth, or they will push the adult tooth out of where it should be an affect alignment of the mouth. In some dogs, especially toy and small breeds, puppy teeth are not lost when they should be, a condition called 'retained deciduous teeth'. Removal of retained deciduous teeth can be done at the time of your pet's spay or neuter.

Behavior: Drs. Schatzle and Meisner will be happy to discuss basic puppy training with you at your puppy visit, and provide relevant literature. It is recommended your puppy be enrolled in an obedience class; the front desk staff at La Costa Animal Hospital will be happy to provide references for obedience schools and trainers in the area.

Congenital conditions: during your puppy's first physical examination, Drs. Schatzle and Meisner will look for congenital conditions (diseases your puppy may be born with) that require early intervention, to ensure your puppy gets the best possible care from day one.

What to expect in coming years:

*Every 6 months:* Bordetella vaccine

*Annually:* fecal examination, heartworm test, distemper vaccine +/- Lyme vaccine, +/- leptospirosis vaccine, +/- rattlesnake vaccine

*Every 6 months to 2 years:* most pets will need a 'dental' routinely, though those whose teeth are brushed daily will generally need fewer dentals. A dental at minimum involves blood work, general anesthesia and teeth cleaning (scale/polish). If particular teeth appear diseased, dental x-rays will be recommended and possibly extractions (tooth pulling). Routine dentals and daily teeth brushing will reduce the likelihood that your pet will need extensive x-rays or extractions at the time of each dental.

*Every three years:* Rabies vaccine