

HORIZON ANIMAL HOSPITAL – New Pet Owner’s Guide

If you are a new pet owner, there are many questions you may have. Hopefully this guide will help.

VACCINATIONS.

Puppies:

Puppies should receive a series of vaccinations.

Vaccine requirements vary depending on what area of the country you live in.

For the Phoenix metro area we recommend the following:

Parvo (4 shots)

Distemper (3 shots)

Rabies (1 shot - required by law)

The first shot (Parvo + Distemper) is generally given at or after 6 weeks of age then the second and third shots (also Parvo + Distemper) are given at two or three week intervals. The final shots (Rabies & Parvo) are usually given between 12 and 16 weeks of age.

Dogs:

For the next three years we recommend that your pet receive a Parvo and Distemper booster at 12 month intervals following the completion of the puppy shot series. After the third booster (~ four years of age) the frequency of booster immunizations can be reduced to once every three years.

By law puppies must be at least 12 weeks old to receive their first rabies shot. A rabies booster is also required 12 months following the first vaccination, however, rabies boosters are only required once every three years following the second immunization.

If you intend to board your dog when you are away from home, or if you have your pet groomed, most boarding and grooming facilities will require a Bordetella vaccine to protect against “Kennel Cough”. It may be necessary to vaccinate more than once per year because some facilities require the vaccination to be current within 6 months.

Kittens:

It is important to know if your cat will be spending time outdoors. All cats should receive distemper and upper respiratory vaccinations, usually at 8 and 12 weeks of age. However, if they are going to be allowed outdoors, then you should also consider vaccinating for feline leukemia and rabies.

Rabies vaccinations for cats are not required by law, however, we routinely recommend feline rabies vaccine for the following two reasons:

- 1) Boarding facilities may require it, and...
- 2) If someone gets scratched or bitten, Animal Control may require your cat to be quarantined unless you can provide proof of a current rabies immunization.

Cats:

Twelve months after the completion of the kitten series you should booster all of the vaccines (distemper and upper respiratory for indoor cats plus rabies and feline leukemia for indoor/outdoor cats). Thereafter, boosters should be given once every three years.

Other vaccines may also be appropriate if you spend a lot of time with them out in nature. For instance, in the Phoenix area, you might consider giving your dog a rattlesnake vaccine. Obviously this isn’t needed in many areas of the country. If your pets travel with you, you might want to consider heartworm preventative. You should discuss these options with your veterinarian.

DIET

There are many good diets available, and even more hype. When considering what to feed, you need to address what life stage your pet is in, does it have special medical restrictions or needs, and remember, even the best food does no good if your pet won’t eat it.

What to feed? Dry, canned, raw, or home cooked? Every choice has its advantages and disadvantages.

Dry is the most cost effective and convenient but some nutrients may be lost in the processing. Canned may be easier to eat, especially for miniature breeds, but may cause tartar to accumulate faster.

Raw may be more natural but can harbor pathogens.

Home cooked can be challenging to make balanced and complete, but addresses some of the pathogen issues.

Obviously your personal lifestyle will impact the decision, but don't forget to talk to your veterinarian about your preferences and choices to make sure you have all the information you need to make an informed decision.

DEWORMING

All puppies and kittens should have a fecal sample checked for parasites. It is very important to understand that some of these parasites may be transmissible to humans. The type of parasites that you are likely to encounter is affected by the area of the country you are in (or from).

In many places around the country it is common for veterinarians to routinely de-worm pets at various intervals to keep them parasite free. Here in the desert the heat and dry conditions make parasite transmission less likely and we don't recommend automatically treating for parasites unless we get a positive test result. We do, however, recommend testing with each annual exam.

The reason we always recommend testing of new puppies or kittens is that if the mother comes here from a different part of the country, she may have a particular stage of parasite that can live in her muscle tissue and cannot be detected by testing a fecal sample. These parasites can still be passed to puppies or kittens through the placenta, which is why we always recommend that they be tested.

SPAYING OR NEUTERING

Unless your pet is a show animal or intended for breeding, we strongly recommend that they be spayed or neutered.

Females that are spayed before their second heat have a lower incidence of mammary cancer and it is estimated that 90% of males that have not been neutered will eventually develop testicular tumors.

Since we want to prevent as many health problems as possible (not to mention unplanned litters of puppies or kittens) the prudent thing to do is spay or neuter. We generally recommend surgery around 6 months of age, although it can be done earlier, depending on the pet's size and weight.

HOUSETRAINING

This is a challenge that most puppy owners may find daunting, and will likely be the largest investment of time. For the kitten owner, the process is almost automatic.

Puppies may need to visit the "potty spot" as frequently as once an hour. However, there are particular key times that you should pay attention to. Puppies may feel the need to go after a nap or after a play session and, in particular, after a meal. Since there is a reflex to have a bowel movement after eating, this can be a good time to take them outside to associate going outside before going potty. Also, by feeding on a schedule you can train their little bodies to also follow a schedule.

Confinement, such as in a crate, causes the puppy to try not to "soil the nest". If done for SHORT periods of time this helps to train them to control their eliminations.

Praise is a good reward, but sometimes a small treat—given as they are just finished accomplishing their task—is needed to cement the idea for some puppies. This can also help as negative reinforcement since they do not get praise or a treat for going in the house.

Many people mistakenly believe that putting a puppy's nose in a soiled area and scolding them teaches them not to do it "there". In fact, all they learn is how to know when you are angry and to act submissive to avoid punishment. They cannot make the leap of analysis that they must control their urges to avoid your displeasure. However, they can recognize the cause and effect when you praise them for going in the proper place.

Another way to think about it is similar to potty training a child. We train them that when they feel the urge they are supposed to go into the bathroom. We tell them "WHERE" to go and what to do, not "WHERE NOT" to go.

To be successful it obviously takes time, effort and constant vigilance. Many owners note that they just turn their back for a moment and an accident happens, usually in another room. It may be helpful to put a leash on the puppy and tie it to your waist if you are busy with a task. This makes it impossible for the puppy to sneak away and more likely you will notice pre-potty behavior.

For kittens, it can be as simple as showing them where the litter box is and to keep it easily accessible. If a kitten is not using the box, you should first determine if there are any conditions preventing it from doing so. For instance, is the litter box too high and, therefore, the kitten must struggle to get in. Or, do you have another cat that is chasing it away from the litter box. If so, the kitten may learn to prefer another spot of its own choosing. Once an alternate preference is established it can be very difficult to break the habit. If problems such as these have been eliminated, then you should have the kitten examined by your veterinarian to make sure there are no underlying medical problems.