

The good news is that if you take some commonsense precautions while socializing your puppy, the risk of infection is quite small compared to the much larger risk of your puppy developing serious behavior problems with fear and aggression later in life.

Veterinarians specializing in behavior recommend that owners take advantage of every opportunity to socialize young puppies in environments like puppy classes, where the risk of illness can be minimized. They state that:

"Puppy socialization classes offer a safe and organized means of socializing puppies. Each puppy should have up-to-date vaccinations and be disease and parasite free before entering the class. Where possible, classes should be held on surfaces that are easily cleaned and disinfected (e.g., indoor environments). Visits to dog parks or other areas that aren't sanitized or are highly trafficked by dogs of unknown vaccination or disease status should be avoided."

The recommendation is to socialize puppies as safely as possible by exposing the puppy to people, places and other animals while not taking unnecessary risks. Well-run puppy classes—indoor classes where all the puppies have been vaccinated at least once—are a safe and smart way to socialize a puppy.

"In general, puppies can start puppy socialization classes as early as 7 to 8 weeks of age. Puppies should receive a minimum of one set of vaccines at least 7 days prior to the first class and a first deworming. They should be kept up-to-date on vaccines throughout the class."

Other Safe Ways to Safely Socialize a Puppy Who Is Not Fully Vaccinated

- Drive to a busy mall and hang out with your pup on a mat at the entrance. Strangers will flock to you because they want to pet your puppy and they'll willingly feed him the treats that you've brought with you.
- Host a puppy party! Invite friends and family over, play some music, toss some streamers, and pass your pup around.
- Bring your puppy to indoor Scouts meetings. Supervise the children interacting with him to make sure he's not frightened by them and they're being gentle.
- Take your pup on car rides through different neighborhoods, drive-thrus, car washes, and out into the country where he'll see and smell a variety of farm animals.
- Arrange play sessions with other puppies and adult dogs who you know are healthy and friendly.
- If your puppy is small enough, carry him around town and let strangers pet him and give him treats.



Exposure Checklist for Socialization

Men and women of different builds

Babies, Toddlers, Children

Teenagers, Adults, Elderly People

People with Wheelchairs/Crutches

People on rollerblades, skateboards, bicycles

People in uniforms

Delivery People

People with masks, hats, or beards

People of varied ethnicities

Crowds, clapping, cheering

Livestock, fowl

Puppies, friendly adult dogs

Buses, cars, trucks

Shiny/slippery floors or surfaces

Walks after dark or in bad weather

Elevators

Lawnmowers

Balconies/stairs

Drive Thru, car washes, tunnels

Electrical appliances, washers and dryers

Vacuum cleaners

Wind, rain, thunder, snow

Fireworks, fairs, sporting events

Veterinary hospitals

Stores

Strollers

Areas of crowds with small children

Gravel, mud, cement, grass, water puddles

The more and larger variety of situations, people, and experiences you can acclimate your pet to the better!

