

Veterinary Visits

How to help your dog

By Katey Aldred MSc, Fdsc, RVN, APDT (01204), CBATI, PPG



Introduction

When an owner gets a new puppy there are lots of exciting things to look forward to, veterinary visits are not often given enough thought. Your puppy will need to visit a veterinary practice within a week of first arriving home and then at least once per year through adulthood. Some puppies and dogs have to visit the veterinary practice much more than once per year. This isn't something any dog owner wants to happen, but at some point, medical treatment will be needed.

Studies have shown that veterinary visits can have a negative effect on dog behaviour. Research indicates that over 60% of dogs visiting a veterinary practice experience fear when entering the examination room. Preparation and planning for veterinary care is an important aspect of dog ownership.



Where to Start



Vaccinations

Before bringing your puppy home ask the breeder if they are giving the first vaccination. If they are, ask them for the specific brand that their veterinary practice will administer. Different vaccine brands are not compatible, and your most convenient practice might not stock the matching brand.

Once you know the brand you should ring around your local veterinary practices to ask which brands, they stock and use. This will ensure you avoid having to restart a vaccination course. Be prepared that you might need to travel further to get the right vaccination. If you struggle to find a practice with compatible vaccinations it might be worth asking your breeder to hold off on giving the first vaccine to your puppy.

Picking a veterinary practice

Veterinary practices are regulated by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and by law under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1996. As such, there is a standard of care required across the profession which means there really shouldn't be a 'bad' veterinary practice.

There are some things you might like to consider when choosing a practice:

- Location: where is the practice located? How will you get there if you do not drive for example? If you have a large dog, how will you transport your dog if an injury prevents them from walking
- Premises: does the premises look well maintained? Do the consulting rooms and waiting areas look adequate? Is there plenty of space with separate dog and cat waiting areas? Does the practice have any cat friendly clinic awards (bronze, silver or gold)? If they do this shows they have considered the general needs of patients when in the practice.
- Approach: does the practice look professional, are the staff welcoming and friendly? Ultimately it is a business and should appear welcoming, organised and have things like opening times clearly displayed.
- Practice tours: you can ask for a practice tour to check these things out prior to registering. There will be areas you are not allowed into for hygiene reasons such as operating theatres. Patient wards should be clean, tidy, comfortable and warm. NOTE: the COVID pandemic may impact this option due to safe practice.
- How many sites? Does your practice have multiple sites and branches? Will you have to visit different branches for different services? For example, when they are closed where do they provide out of hours emergency care? Where is their laboratory based, can they do many tests in-house or do they have to be sent away?
- Out of hours care: what happens in an emergency when the practice is closed? Will you be able to go to your normal practice or travel? Some out of hours providers can be up to an hour away, would this be suitable in a severe emergency?
- Corporate or independent practice: you might want to ask this question especially if you are keen to support independent businesses. It is worth noting the service delivered should not vary between the two.
- Look at reviews: but with a 'pinch of salt'. Reviews online can be helpful, but expectations of veterinary care do not often meet reality and often some reviews are unjustified. They can be based on a pure emotional response that is often very biased and one sided when negative.
- Additional extras: what extras does the practice provide? Do they have a health club you can subscribe to which will give you benefits such as discounts, claw clipping, cheaper preventative care?
- Ask for recommendations: where are your friends, family and neighbours registered? Can they recommend a veterinary surgeon by name that they have had a great experience with?





Common Myths

I have health club membership, so my puppy is insured:

MYTH

- Healthy pet club schemes run by veterinary practices are not the same as insurance.
- Healthy pet club schemes generally offer a yearly or monthly payment to receive things like vaccinations, flea/worm treatment, a 6-monthly check up and sometimes more.
- Insurance is a yearly or monthly fee which provides you with protection if your pet is injured or ill to help you cover the veterinary fees.

My dog is insured so I will be financially covered if any illness or injury occurs: MYTH (unless you have been good at your research)

- Some insurance companies exclude certain conditions.
- If your pet has been ill BEFORE you took out the policy that condition will be excluded from cover.
- Some insurance policies do not provide illness for life cover. For example, if your puppy develops allergies, some companies will only pay out for the first year of life and no longer.
- Insurance policies have a cap on how much money they will pay out either per year or per condition. A couple of nights stay at a veterinary practice will be over £1,000. A few nights at a referral practice will be more than this. If you have a policy with low cover the chances, are you will not recoup all the fees you have to pay out.
- Some insurance companies drag their feet paying out claims and may decline the claim.

The veterinary surgeon will try and get me to buy their food as they earn commission: MYTH

- Veterinary surgeons do not earn any money from selling food to owners.
- If the veterinary surgeon recommends a specific food to you it is because they believe it will be of benefit to your dog.

Veterinary practices only care about earning money: MYTH

- Ethically and legally all veterinary surgeons have a duty of care to their patients to provide the best service. This will sometimes involve costly tests and medications.
- Veterinary practices purchase their supplies from specific wholesalers who set prices which reflect in the prices set to owners. This is why some medications are cheaper online and remember, an online pharmacy does not have the overheads to fund that a practice does: multi-skilled staff and expensive equipment.
- Owners have a legal duty to keep their pets free from unnecessary suffering, the veterinary surgeon's advice aids owners in this duty.
- Did you know that suicide in the veterinary profession in the UK is at least three times the rate than in other professions? This is due to a number of factors, but emotional stress is high on the list.
- Individual veterinary staff members have no authority over the costs. If it is a corporate practice these costs may even be set by the head office

How to help your dog prepare for veterinary visits

Handling

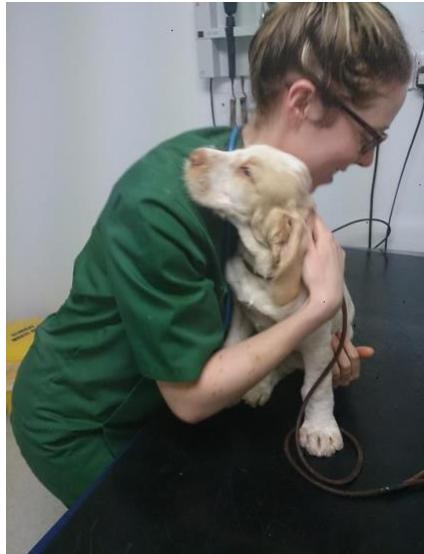
Handling a puppy in the correct and structured manner and help prepare the puppy for veterinary visits. Body handling is physically touching and handling your puppy. As owners we tend to touch puppies a lot whilst providing affection but can neglect to focus on key points of the body.

Incorporating key points into body handling such as: eyes, ears, mouth, shoulders, legs, feet, between the toes, claws, under the tail and genitalia can prove very useful.

Exploring and teaching your puppy to be comfortable with you touching these areas prepares the puppy for future care. This can include grooming, veterinary care or showing if you decide to do this.

It allows you to become familiar with your puppy and then dog's normal body features. You will detect any abnormalities sooner which will result in quicker care and treatment where it is needed. This might be as simple as a knot in the fur that you can resolve yourself or more complicated like a lump that needs veterinary treatment.

Gentle habituation will occur by regular body handling which will prepare your puppy for future handling. At some point all dogs have to visit a veterinarian, puppies that are used to body handling can show less stress and more resilience under these conditions. If your puppy or dog suffers an emergency, body handling experience can help to reduce stress during the emergency which can result in faster treatment.



Introduce veterinary items

Introduce your puppy early on to items your veterinary surgeon might use which can include:

- Stethoscope (you can get a child's toy one)
- Clippers
- Nail trimmers
- Needle and syringes
- Hibiscrub
- Surgical spirit
- Cotton swabs
- Ear cleaner

This will provide some preparation to sights, sounds and smells that your puppy will encounter when visiting practice. Bottles of ear cleaner approaching a puppy can seem like an alien to them so getting them used to the bottle and applicator into the ear for example is an invaluable task.

Training

Start training some key exercises as soon as possible that can be super helpful during veterinary examinations and procedures:

- Stand
- Down
- Lay on a bed
- Open mouth
- Chin targeting

You can watch this clip for a demonstration of chin targeting and how it can be useful:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERQkJr13SLU&t=1s>



BIO



Katey Aldred MSc, FdSc, RVN, APDT (01204), CBATI

Katey Aldred is an Applied Animal Behaviourist and Trainer plus a Registered Veterinary Nurse (RVN) in the UK. Katey holds a master's degree in animal behaviour and training plus a canine specific degree in behaviour and training. She has worked in the animal industry since 2001 gaining practical experience to back up the theoretical experience.

Katey has achieved Pre-certification to become a Certified Clinical Animal Behaviourist and is a provisional member of the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors. She is a member of the Pet Professional Guild along with the UK Association of Pet Dog Trainers. Katey is also a Certified Behaviour Adjustment Training Instructor having studied and honed the method with Grisha Stewart.

Katey runs Pooch Paws Dog Training Club delivering regular classes www.poochpaws.co.uk

Katey also works regularly with owners on a one-to-one basis to help with complex behaviour needs and for training www.kateyaldred.co.uk. In addition, Katey hosts regular workshops with an emphasis for positive gundog training having a passion and specialism in HPR breeds.

Help!

If you are unsure how to begin with your puppy, already have a puppy or dog nervous of handling or veterinary visits you will benefit from some professional guidance.

You will likely benefit from some one-to-one training to talk through these issues and set you a training plan: <https://www.kateyaldred.co.uk/training/>

You may also benefit from the online course 'Pandemic Puppies':
<https://school.grishastewart.com/courses/pandemic?ref=bb114f>

Get in Touch

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www.kateyaldred.co.uk

Facebook: Katey Aldred – Behaviourist, Veterinary Nurse & Coach

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Useful Links

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/contents>

<https://www.bva.co.uk/pet-owners-and-breeders/choosing-a-vet/>

<https://knowledge.rcvs.org.uk/heritage-and-history/history-of-the-rvcs/veterinary-legislation-in-the-uk/>