

When Can a Puppy Go Outside Safely?

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Letting your puppy outside is far more complicated than most new pet parents realize. Obviously, we all want to take our adorable new puppies out into the world to show them off and socialize them as soon as possible, but the outside world does present risks to your puppy.

The biggest worry is that [puppies may get infected with illnesses](#) from another dog or from the environment. Because some of these infections can be deadly and many of them don't have treatments aside from supportive care, the goal is to minimize the risk to your puppy as much as possible. For this reason, **taking your puppy into public spaces isn't recommended until he's fully vaccinated.**

But this is a catch-22 because puppies also need to be socialized as much as possible and as early as possible. The critical socialization period for puppies is when they're 3-12 weeks old. Since they aren't fully vaccinated until they're about 18-22 weeks old, when can puppies be around other dogs safely?

Here's what you need to know about keeping your pup safe—and social.

When Can Puppies Go Outside for the First Time?

Puppies shouldn't go outside in public until they are fully vaccinated. The [timeline for vaccinating puppies](#) varies from dog to dog, but, generally speaking, the limiting factor is when they are done with their [DAPP \(Distemper, Adenovirus, Parainfluenza, Parvovirus\) vaccine series](#). This vaccine is boosted approximately every three weeks until puppies are 16-20 weeks old.

Two weeks after your puppy receives his last vaccine, he is considered fully vaccinated and can safely go outside. So if your puppy's last vaccine is given at 16 weeks old, it's safe for him to go outside at 18 weeks old. If it's given at 17 weeks, then he's safe at 19 weeks old.

However, it's generally safe for a puppy to go outside in your backyard, assuming you haven't had any sick animals in your backyard within the past year. While it may not seem like it, your backyard is very different from a public park—because, unlike a park, it's generally a controlled environment, especially if it's fenced in. Any dog at a dog park could potentially be sick, or a sick dog could have contaminated the environment.

Some of the many diseases that could be transmitted at a public park include:

- [Parvovirus](#)
- [Distemper virus](#)
- [Kennel cough](#) (parainfluenza virus, influenza virus, Bordetella)
- [Leptospirosis](#)

- Adenovirus (though unlikely)
- [Rabies](#) (also unlikely, but possible)

Many of these diseases either have no treatment or can cost thousands of dollars to treat. To help keep your pup as safe as possible, avoid the risk altogether by not letting him go outside in public places until he is fully vaccinated.

When Can Your Puppy Go on a Walk?

Wait to take your puppy for a walk until he's fully vaccinated—typically around 18 weeks of age. Again, most vaccines take two weeks to take effect (except for the rabies vaccine, which takes 28 days to take effect). So don't assume your puppy is fully vaccinated and safe to go to the park right after his last booster.

The Puppy Vaccine Schedule

The vaccines recommended prior to allowing your puppy outside can vary greatly depending on where you live, so it's important that you consult your veterinarian to determine what is best for your puppy.

The core vaccines every dog should get are:

- **DAPP (Distemper, Adenovirus, Parainfluenza, Parvovirus virus):** This vaccine is administered when a puppy is around 6-8 weeks old. Puppies get a booster every 3-4 weeks until they're 16-20 weeks old.
- **Rabies:** This vaccine is typically given around 12-15 weeks of age. It cannot be administered before a puppy is 12 weeks old.

Talk to your veterinarian to determine which, if any, lifestyle or risk-based vaccines are recommended for your pup. These include:

- **Bordetella:** Protects against Bordetella, a primary cause of kennel cough. This vaccine can be administered when a puppy is as young as 8 weeks old. Depending on the prevalence in your community and the type of Bordetella vaccine available at your vet's office, your pup may or may not need a booster three weeks later.
- **Leptospirosis:** This is a bacterial infection primarily transmitted through infected urine or urine-contaminated soil, water, food, or bedding. This vaccine can be given as early as 12 weeks of age, and puppies will need a booster vaccine three weeks later.
- **Influenza:** This vaccine protects against canine influenza, another primary cause of kennel cough. Similar to leptospirosis, this vaccine can be given as early as 12 weeks old and will need a booster three weeks later.
- **Lyme:** The [Lyme vaccine](#) protects dogs against Lyme disease, a [tick-borne illness](#). It can also be given when a puppy is 12 weeks old and requires a booster three weeks later.
- **Rattlesnake:** Whether your puppy needs this vaccine depends on where you live. It's also

important to note that **receiving this vaccine does not mean your puppy does not need medical attention if bitten by a rattlesnake**—it simply gives you more time to get to the vet hospital for antivenom. It's also generally the last vaccine vets give puppies (when they're 18-22 weeks old), as it cannot be given with any other vaccines.

How to Safely Socialize Your Puppy

Puppies shouldn't go out into public until they're fully vaccinated, but they should be socialized as early as possible.

To start the socialization process, bring your puppy around friends or family members **who have dogs that are vaccinated and are not currently sick**. Socialization can be done in your home or backyard, or their home or backyard—as long as they have not had any sick dogs in their backyard recently.

Puppy classes can also be a great way to start to socialize your puppy early. Just be sure the class requires all dogs to show proof of an up-to-date vaccination history. While this does still present a risk, it's minimal.

Once fully vaccinated, your pup can start to go outside, into public places like pet stores, and interact with stranger dogs. The goal is to provide your puppy with as many positive social interactions as possible.

When it comes to socializing puppies with other animals, like cats, many diseases cannot be transmitted from one species to another (with very, very few exceptions—[one being rabies](#)). This means a cat virus won't be transmitted to a dog, and a dog virus won't be transmitted to a cat. You can make these introductions when your puppy is still undergoing his vaccines.

Tips for Keeping Your Puppy Protected

- Consult your veterinarian to determine which vaccines your puppy needs and get all vaccines they feel are necessary.
- Discuss how many vaccines are safe to give your puppy at one time. The more vaccines given at once, the higher the risk of a vaccine reaction, especially in small breed dogs.
- Avoid taking your puppy to public places, especially places frequented by dogs. This includes dog parks and pet stores.
- Carry your puppy in and out of veterinary hospitals. While every precaution is taken by the vet staff to protect your puppy, it's possible a sick dog walked through the parking lot or contaminated an area that the staff has not yet had the opportunity to disinfect.
- Don't let your puppy interact with dogs that have an unknown vaccination history.
- Avoid letting your puppy sniff animal feces outside.
- Make sure all dogs in your household are up-to-date on vaccines.
- Allow your puppy to have access to a fenced-in yard.