**Socializing animals safely in spring in Seattle**

Spring has arrived in Seattle, the time of flowers and new puppies. The latest and greatest advice from the veterinary behaviorists is to get puppies in puppy classes as soon as possible. This means get their first distemper-parvovirus vaccination and get them enrolled in socialization and training classes as soon as eight weeks of age. Long gone are the days where waiting until 4 months of age are considered appropriate. Exposure to as many different kinds of other animals, people, situations, and activities will help a young pup adapt better as they age.

Routine fecal exams that screen for worms as well as a parasite called [giardia](http://www.examiner.com/topic/giardia/articles) are very important, especially if going to parks, daycare, classes, and particularly if there are any signs of loose stool, vomiting, rough coat, [fleas](http://www.examiner.com/topic/fleas), or failure to gain weight. Fleas, giardia and other fecal-borne infections are likely more of a risk than the viruses given our current standards for [vaccines](http://www.examiner.com/topic/vaccines). So, a pup is more likely to get a parasite than a virus, as long as at least the first vaccine has been given to a pup that has a functioning immune system. Fleas, giardia and other [parasites](http://www.examiner.com/topic/parasites) are more common for dogs to get from day cares and parks than most viruses.

Keep in mind that vaccines are labeled for healthy animals, so if a puppy has any sort of condition that may be putting additional strain on their immune system, waiting on vaccines and puppy classes may be ideal. Also, physical exams are essential to monitoring young animals’ growth and development. It is not the vaccines that make an animal healthy, but the overall management of nutrition, rate of growth, socialization, genetics, and other environmental factors.

This brings us to another important point. Many folks assume that cats are antisocial. In reality, if exposed to other animals early in life, and on a continued basis, many cats also enjoy camaraderie with others of their own and other species. Keep this in mind when adopting or taking in a new animal companion. If only one kitten or pup fits into your budget, make sure to provide play dates with other healthy individuals of their own kind, so that they can have a fuller life experience of play and socialization. One never knows when that playful kitten that grows up into an isolated, crabby adult may find him or herself with a roommate of another cat or other animal. Earlier positive experiences can make that transition much more smooth, healthy, and fun.