



# The Ultimate Blue Book for Dogs

If you're a proud pet parent of a new puppy then you're in for a fascinating time! As puppies grow and reach new stages in their development, they need us to anticipate and meet their needs so they can become healthy and well-adjusted dogs.

This involves setting up their home, health checks, preventative treatments, training and lots of love and attention! A great way to keep a health record for your puppy and to celebrate their developmental milestones is to create a 'Puppy Blue Book' for their first six months.

Firstly, to meet your puppy's needs, it's important to be aware of the recognised [stages of puppy development](#). This helps you to know what to expect, although we must remember that all puppies are individuals. If you have any concerns about your puppy's development, your veterinarian is the best source of advice. You can also refer to a reputable source of information on puppy care but again, discuss any questions with your veterinarian.

Puppies should remain with their mothers until they reach at least [8 weeks of age](#) because until then, they are dependent on her milk for nutrients (exclusively in the first 4 weeks) and for building immunity.

This is also a time to learn canine social skills from their mother and litter mates, including [vital behaviours](#) such as how to use their mouths gently.

Once you decide you are going to add a puppy to your family you can start getting [prepared](#) for the day when your pup can come home with you. This is an exciting time and will keep you busy until your bundle of fur is ready to join his or her new family.

Preparation involves safety proofing your home, setting up bedding, and purchasing food, bowls, leash, collar, identification tag, crate or carry case, car harness, dental and grooming equipment, dog shampoo, toilet bags and safe toys, including chew toys.

You will also need to find a veterinary clinic, book an initial health check for your new puppy, enrol him or her in puppy classes and consider taking out pet insurance. You'll also need to understand how to register your dog and ensure they are [microchipped](#) with your contact details before they come home. And if your puppy is coming from a breeder rather than a rescue organisation, organise a visit to inspect the premises and meet your future puppy and his or her parents [before you commit to buying the puppy](#).

# Stages of puppy development

## ☐ Neonatal stage (approximately 0 to 2 weeks of age):

During the first two weeks, puppies are completely dependent on their mother, who feeds them, keeps them warm and helps them toilet. They don't move much at this stage and their senses are limited to taste and touch. Pups in the neonatal stage spend most of their time suckling or sleeping. Although they don't bark, they do make adorable squeaking and grunting sounds! Handling by humans should be minimal.

## ☐ Transitional stage (approximately 2 to 4 weeks of age):

This is when puppies open their eyes and ears and become aware of their surroundings. They start to move more, crawl and walk, and even begin exploring and playing with their littermates. They also find their voice, so look out for that first puppy bark! Baby teeth (or 'milk teeth') start to appear during this period. By week 4, puppies are ready to transition to solid food but are not fully weaned until 8 weeks of age. By 3 weeks of age and once they are walking, puppies should start getting used to being handled by humans, beginning with very short sessions.

## ☐ Socialisation stage (approximately 3 to 17 weeks of age):

Socialisation is a critical part of a puppy's development and it starts as early as 3 weeks. Puppies must be gradually exposed to a range of new experiences, including sights, sounds, objects, people and other animals, as well as being protected from negative experiences during this period. This will set them up to develop confidence rather than anxiety in these situations, and to become well-adjusted adults who relate well to people and other animals.





# Stages of puppy development

## □ Testing period (approximately 3-6 months):

Between 3 and 6 months is the time puppies start to test the boundaries and limits, so [reward-based training](#) is essential, and should be introduced before this period. Puppies also experience [teething and chewing](#) until around 6 months, when their second teeth have come through, so will need to be redirected to chew toys.

Understanding the stages of puppy development helps you to look out for the milestones they should reach and to understand your responsibilities.

Your Puppy Blue Book is a great way to get started and ideally you would take this to all veterinary appointments. It should include both milestones and a personal health record (including dates of upcoming routine health checks; a record of vaccinations and preventative treatments; outcome of veterinary appointments; response to any treatments; regular bodyweight entries; notes on any illnesses, injuries, or behavioural concerns; and any dietary changes).

The book can be in any format, such as a large diary or even a scrapbook, and photographs will bring the story alive. If you're tech savvy, you may be able to set it up digitally. It's best to keep the record of vaccinations and preventative treatments in a separate section, and to ensure you don't overlook anything, ask your veterinarian about a suitable app for reminders.



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Below are some suggestions to get you started, but you will no doubt have many special moments to include that are unique to your puppy and your family:

- Visit to your puppy and to meet the parents
- Solid foods introduced (from 4 weeks of age)
- Gentle handling introduced (from around 3 weeks of age)
- [Toilet training](#) begins (from around 5 weeks of age, to be continued as soon as puppy comes home, using positive reward-based training)
- First [vaccination](#) (at 6 to 8 weeks)
- [Microchipping](#)
- Puppy arrives home
- Registration with council
- First health check with veterinarian and discussion about future vaccinations, schedule for preventative treatments (for intestinal worms, heartworms, fleas and ticks), timing of desexing and [dietary advice](#)
- Consider taking out a pet insurance policy
- Worming prevention (from 2 weeks of age, fortnightly until 12 weeks of age, then monthly until 6 months of age)
- Heartworm prevention (from 6 or 12 weeks of age, depending on the product)
- Start of [basic training](#) from around 7 weeks ('sit', 'come', 'stay', 'drop', learning name, learning to wear collar and [walk on leash](#)), recording dates when puppy responds to requests consistently
- Gradual exposure to a range of new experiences, including people and animals, places and experiences; this list can be added to as you go, but it may help to use a [checklist](#) to ensure you cover the essentials, such as being handled and trips to the veterinarian



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- Learns to go to their crate (if crate trained)
- Recognises their own name
- Toilets in appropriate place consistently
- Starts [puppy school](#) (from 8 to 16 weeks)
- Second vaccination (generally 10 to 12 weeks of age)
- Accepts collar and leash
- First bath
- Accepts being brushed
- Starts home [teeth cleaning](#)
- Walks without pulling on the leash
- Desexing (from 8 weeks, based on veterinary advice)
- Permanent teeth start to appear (around 3 months and may last until 6 months)
- Teething
- Third vaccination (generally at 16 weeks old, followed by boosters as recommended by your veterinarian)
- Socialisation and walking outside the home on a leash when fully vaccinated
- Playdates with other dogs
- Training classes (from 4 months)

# Conclusion

Your puppy will bring great joy and excitement to your home and if you're well prepared and armed with the right knowledge, you'll get them through the first six months in leaps and bounds!

It's important to remember you're not alone – your veterinarian, puppy school, and reputable trainers all provide a vital role in setting your puppy up to be happy and healthy and ready for the next stage – adolescence!

One of the best ways to help ensure you can give your new furry family member the best care possible is by taking out an [RSPCA Pet Insurance](#) policy. Taking out pet insurance when your dog is at the puppy stage can help give them the care they deserve when they get sick or injured accidentally, without the financial stress of unexpected vet bills.



**For more information call 1300 855 150  
between 8am - 8pm Monday to Friday AEST.**

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