



## **FAQ: Dog Reproduction**

### ***At what age can a dog be spayed or neutered?***

As young as six weeks old (although male puppies must have both of their testicles descended before being neutered). In the past, many people have waited until a dog is at least six months old before having her or him spayed or neutered. However, it is far better to do the surgery at a younger age, before the animal reaches sexual maturity. Therefore, we recommend spaying or neutering by four months of age.

### ***What are the benefits of spaying a female dog?***

Spaying a dog will almost completely eliminate the risk of her developing an infection of the uterus (pyometra). This is a very common and severe condition in intact female dogs, which is usually fatal unless the dog undergoes emergency surgery. Up to 75 percent of female dogs who are not spayed will develop this condition. Other benefits include a reduction in the risk of mammary (breast) cancer, elimination of the risk of uterine cancer, avoidance of inconvenient heat cycles and the risks associated with mating, pregnancy and birth, and much lower dog licensing fees.

### ***What are the benefits of neutering a male dog?***

Neutering a male dog completely eliminates the risk of testicular cancer. It also greatly reduces the risk of prostate infections, and often reduces certain problem behaviors such as mounting, urine marking, aggression to other dogs, escaping and roaming. Also, license fees for neutered dogs are much lower.

### ***At what age do female dogs first go into heat?***

As early as six months of age. Most dogs are sexually mature by one year of age, but some dogs may not reach sexual maturity until 18 months of age.

### ***How many times a year do female dogs go into heat?***

This varies from dog to dog, but typically female dogs go into heat one to four times per year.

### ***During what times of the year can a female dog get pregnant?***

The heat cycles of most dogs are not affected by the season. So, dogs can potentially become pregnant at any time of the year.

### ***For how long do female dogs stay in heat?***

Female dogs have two main phases of their heat cycle, and the length of each phase can vary considerably between dogs. The first phase, pro-estrus, lasts about nine days. In this phase, female dogs will attract male dogs and may show bleeding from their vagina, but usually will not allow male dogs to mate with them. The second phase, estrus, also lasts about nine days. During estrus, a female will allow a male dog to mate with her and can easily become pregnant.

### ***How many litters can female dogs have each year?***

This depends on how often the dog goes into heat, so can vary from one to four litters per year.

***What is the gestation period for a pregnant dog?***

58 to 68 days. 65 days is average.

***Can dogs become pregnant while they are nursing puppies?***

Unlike cats, dogs are very unlikely to become pregnant while they are nursing. However, they can go into heat and become pregnant as early as three months after giving birth, so it is important to have a mother dog spayed as soon as possible after her puppies have been weaned.

***At what age do unspayed female dogs stop giving birth to puppies?***

Unlike humans, dogs do not go through "menopause." While fertility gradually declines over time, there is no particular age after which a female dog can no longer become pregnant.

***Can dogs from the same litter mate and produce litters?***

Yes. For this reason, male and female littermates who are housed together must be neutered and spayed by four months of age!

***If my dog is pregnant, can she be spayed?***

Yes. The surgery, however, can be slightly more difficult in a pregnant dog. This is one reason why it is so important to have your dog spayed before she can ever become pregnant (that is, before her first heat).

***Can dogs be spayed/neutered if they've been sick?***

Yes, but it is a good idea to wait a little while before spaying or neutering dogs that have recovered from a serious illness, such as parvovirus. There are two reasons for this: 1) to avoid the stress of surgery in an animal who is still under the stress of illness; and 2) to avoid taking an animal who is still contagious to a clinic where he or she could shed disease-causing germs. In particular, dogs who have been ill with parvovirus should wait about two weeks following their recovery before having surgery.

***Should I allow my female dog to have one litter before spaying her?***

No. There is absolutely no benefit to the dog in doing this. It also needlessly exposes your dog to the risks of mating, pregnancy and delivery. Spaying a dog before her first litter is easier and safer. In addition, spaying before a dog's first heat (before she can ever become pregnant) drastically reduces her chance of developing mammary (breast) cancer. If she is allowed to go through one or more heat cycles before she is spayed, her risk of developing mammary cancer increases.

***Is there a pet overpopulation problem in Sacramento?***

Yes. Every year, as many as 20,000 dogs and cats are euthanized in Sacramento-area shelters because there aren't enough homes for them. Spaying or neutering your dog will help reduce this tragedy!

**Spayed and neutered dogs are less expensive to license. Find out how much money you can save by altering your pet at [www.sspca.org/Vaccination.html](http://www.sspca.org/Vaccination.html)**

*Compiled by Barb Jones, DVM*

Sources:

Feldman E.C., Nelson R.W. *Canine and Feline Endocrinology and Reproduction*. 3rd ed. St. Louis, Missouri: Saunders, 2004.

Ptaszynka M. *Compendium of animal reproduction*. 7th ed: Intervet International, 2002.