



Living with an Intact Female Dog

The NHSPCA normally requires that all cats and dogs receive spay or neuter surgery prior to adoption. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, veterinarians in some communities have stopped offering elective surgical services, including spay/neuter. Therefore, it has become necessary to adopt animals out before they have been spayed or neutered and plan to proceed with the spay or neuter surgery when our services become available again. Living with an intact (not spayed or neutered) dog can present some challenges, outlined below. It may take several months for normal spay/neuter services to resume in our community, so adopters need to be prepared for the possibility of living with an intact animal for months. Dog overpopulation is still an animal welfare concern, so you will need to follow up with your veterinarian to schedule an appointment for spay or neuter for your pet as soon as possible.

Age and Time of Sexual Maturity

Dogs reach sexual maturity between 5-12 months of age, which is when you may start to notice hormonally-driven behavior problems. This is also when you need to take steps to prevent unwanted pregnancies. As the first heat can occur earlier in some cases, we recommend keeping intact male and female puppies separated from each other starting at ~4 months of age.

Special Considerations for Living with an Intact Female Dog

No Contact Between Intact Males and Females!

It is impossible to keep intact males and females in the same home without a high risk of pregnancy. When female dogs come into heat, intact males can become very forceful in their attempts to reach and mate females. Heat cycles are not always obvious, and female dogs can be fertile before signs of heat are noticeable to owners. This can make it hard to keep intact male and female dogs apart during heat.

Intact Dogs are Less Welcome in Public Places

Boarding facilities, training classes, and daycares may not allow intact dogs due to difficulties in keeping intact animals separate in such facilities.

Urine Marking

Urine marking is not common in female dogs, but it is more likely to occur when female dogs are not spayed. Unlike male dogs, female dogs usually squat when they mark. You might notice small, frequent depositions of urine in socially significant areas (indoor or outdoor).

Urine marking in females is more common when they are coming into or going through a heat cycle (see below). Indoor urine marked areas should be cleaned with an enzymatic cleaner (multiple brands, available for purchase online or in pet supply stores) per package instructions. Focusing on house

training and providing frequent opportunities to eliminate outdoors can help reduce urine marking behavior. Spaying is the most effective treatment for urine marking – over 97% of female dogs will stop problematic urine marking once they are spayed.

Monitoring for pyometra (uterine infection)

Intact female dogs can develop a life-threatening infection of the uterus called pyometra. Signs of this include reduced energy, not wanting to eat, fever, drinking a lot of water, and discharge of pus visible under the tail or on bedding. Affected dogs may have some or all these symptoms. If you notice any of these, contact us immediately.

Heat Cycles

Approximately twice a year intact female dogs will have a heat cycle. The first sign most owners notice is leaking of straw colored or blood-tinged fluid from the vulva. Some dogs are very good at keeping themselves clean when this happens, but if that's not the case for your dog you can manage this fluid by having your dog wear a special 'dog diaper/sanitary pads' when in the home. These are available from many online sources. The 'in heat' period typically lasts 7-10 days, during which time the dog should be kept isolated from other dogs, especially intact males who will be extremely interested in her. She may be more prone to urine marking behavior before and after this period. Spaying during or immediately after a heat cycle is not recommended, so if your dog comes into heat before she can be spayed, note the dates and discuss with your veterinarian when booking the spay. Because intact male dogs will be attracted from significant distances, it is not advisable to bring your female dog to any public areas such as dog parks or training classes when they are in heat. Until the heat cycle is over, best practice is to avoid contact with unfamiliar dogs.