From the Vet - Dr Michael Bell

*Dr Bell writes a monthly column in the DOGS Victoria Magazine which can be viewed in the* [*DOGS Victoria Magazine*](http://www.dogsvictoria.org.au/AboutUs/DOGSVIctoriaMagazine.aspx)*.*Maintaining a healthy puppyby Dr Michael Bell

There are various things you as a new owner should do to maintain a healthy puppy. These include following a strict vaccination, worming and heartworm prevention protocol, ensuring your new puppy is well fed with a nutritionally balanced diet, ensuring good dental health is maintained and that your puppy is microchipped from a young age and groomed appropriately.

Vaccinations
There are various vaccinations available these days, with the most common being a C3 vaccine (covering distemper, hepatitis and parvovirus), or a C5 vaccine (which covers the three main diseases already mentioned plus forms of canine cough). These diseases, especially the first three can be life-threatening.

(i) Canine distemper is a viral disease that can affect any age of dog, especially puppies. Affected dogs often present with a fever, discharge from the eyes and nose, vomiting and diarrhoea. Later in the course of the disease many dogs show muscle spasms, paralysis and if they survive are often left with permanent brain damage.

(ii) Canine hepatitis is a highly infectious disease affecting dogs, especially those under two years of age. Affected dogs go off their food, often have diarrhoea and severe belly aches. In severe cases they can die in 24-36 hours.

(iii) Canine parvovirus is a very contagious virus causing
severe bloody diarrhoea that kills many infected dogs.

(iv) Canine cough can be caused by viruses or bacteria. It produces a very contagious hacking cough that can last for weeks.

There are various different brands of vaccines available, each coming with different recommended vaccination protocols. It is always best to check with your vet to determine the best vaccination protocol for your particular dog.

Puppies should be vaccinated at 6-8 weeks, 12-14 weeks and then often at 16-18 weeks. Where Protech C3 vaccines are used you may not require the third vaccination. When vaccinating against canine cough at least two of these vaccinations need to be C5 vaccinations (unless using Forte Dodge intranasal form of kennel cough where only one of the vaccines needs to contain the canine cough).

Once the series of puppy vaccines has been completed, dogs are required to be vaccinated annually unless the new biannual or triennial vaccines are used. Again it is best to consult your vet as to which of these vaccines best suits you and your dog’s needs.

Worming
Dogs can be affected by various types of worms, these being two types of roundworm, two types of hookworm, whipworm and two types of tapeworm. Many of these worms can also affect people especially young children. Children love to kiss and cuddle dogs, especially puppies and puppies together with adult dogs love to lick puppies faces. During this licking process worm egg and larvae can be easily swallowed by humans. Hence it is very important to worm your dog regularly; in particular young puppies as they can be born with roundworm already inside them and can be infected soon after birth with roundworm and hookworm via their mother’s milk. The various worms can affect dogs in the following ways:

(i) Roundworms are very good survivors with their eggs capable of living in the environment for several years. They can be passed from dogs to people. Dogs affected with notable qualities of roundworms show various signs including vomiting, diarrhoea and belly-ache.

(ii) Hookworms survive inside the dog by burrowing into the gut wall and sucking blood from this area. Like roundworm they too can affect people. Dogs affected by hookworms can also develop diarrhoea.

(iii) Whipworms live in the lower bowel of dogs and can spread many eggs into the dog’s droppings, which in turn can survive in the soil and dogs’ environment for years. Dogs showing signs of whipworm infection may show diarrhoea, weight loss and belly pains.

(iv) Tapeworms – there are two main categories of tapeworm, hydrated tapeworm and the more common flea tapeworm.

(v) Hydrated tapeworms are commonly found in areas where dogs come into contact with sheep, wild pigs and kangaroos. Dogs become infected with the worms after eating hydrated tapeworm from infected animals (e.g. eating infected sheep offal).

With flea tapeworm the larvae develop in fleas and develop into adults in the dogs intestine after dogs eat infected fleas. These tapeworm are not a major health risk to the dog, but cause the dog’s backside to itch leading to them rubbing their backsides on the ground.

Disturbingly around 80% of Australian dogs are affected to some degree by these various intestinal worms, hence it is important that you take preventative action and worm your pet regularly with appropriate worm preparations that will kill all the adult worms. It should be remembered that worming will kill worms present at the time of worming but unlike vaccinations does not prevent against future worm attacks. Because dogs can be reinfected from their environment and other pets, worming treatment must be regular, especially in your dog’s early months. Most veterinarians recommend dogs be wormed at 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12 weeks, then 4, 5 and 6 months and then every three months thereafter. Other things that should be done to keep your dog and family healthy and worm free are as follows:

Keep kennels and sleeping areas clean

Control fleas with appropriate flea products to prevent the common flea tapeworm

Reduce the feeding of raw meat and offal

Wash your hands after playing with your dog, and avoid your dog licking your face

Fleas
Fleas are one of the most common parasitic infections seen in our pets. Flea pupae can survive in your environment for a period of up to six months or more. Fleas start reproducing within 24 to 48 hours of their first feed. Fleas can cause skin irritations together with the transmission of the common flea tapeworm. Not only do fleas cause local irritation, but also prolonged exposure can cause your pet to develop allergies to the flea’s bites. Once this occurs your pet can develop generalised inflammation and irritation from the bite of one flea. For this reason it is extremely important that flea control continues at all times and not just when fleas are seen. Fleas are often resistant to many of the older flea products such as collars, powders and rinses. There are various very effective monthly products available now that provide very good protection against fleas and your local vet can provide you with the best product for your own dog’s situation.

Heartworm
Heartworm is a parasite transmitted by mosquitoes, which causes heart disease and heart failure. In Melbourne it has been found that 7% of the fox population carries the disease.

With heartworm a single bite from a mosquito infected with heartworm can infect your dog. From this bite, heartworm larvae move through the tissues below the skin and then migrate to the heart and adjacent blood vessels of the lungs. Here they develop into adult heartworm.

Heartworm and infection can be prevented by placing your dog on preventative medication. This is available in various forms, these include daily tablets, monthly tablets or a yearly injection. If puppies are placed on heartworm preventatives from a young age (normally starting around first or second puppy vaccinations) there is no need to blood test them first. However if heartworm prevention is commenced later than this, or if a dosage is missed a simple blood test may be required to ensure your dog is heartworm negative.

Microchip
It is ideal for all dogs to be microchipped. Microchips are a small chip the size of a grain of rice that is implanted under the skin between the shoulder blades via injection and provides your dog with a permanent means of identification. It is a fairly quick and relatively painless procedure that can be performed at the time of vaccination or consultation at your local veterinary clinic or at council or DOGS Victoria microchipping days. All councils, RSPCA and vets have microchip readers which often quickly facilitate your pet’s return should they become lost.

These days most councils insist your dog is microchipped before they can become registered. Registration is required with your council once your dog reaches 12 weeks of age.

Dental Health
The food you feed your dog plays an important part in maintaining the health and wellbeing of your dog. Selecting the right food becomes even more important if your pet has dental problems. Because it can be difficult to keep your pet’s teeth clean dental problems are quite common with up to  80% of dogs showing some signs of dental disease (especially older dogs). Dental problems normally start with a build up of sticky plaque which over time hardens to form plaque. If this plaque is not removed then infected, inflamed gums can develop and eventually this infection starts to affect the teeth sockets which can in turn lead to the loss of teeth. The infection of the gums can also spread to affect other body organs. The first thing owners notice when dogs have dental problems is bad breath. Signs that may be seen are yellow or brown tartar over the teeth, bleeding gums, a sore mouth, loose teeth or difficulty in eating.

There are several factors that contribute to the occurrence of dental problems some of these are as follows:

(i) Age – the older your dog, the more chance your dog has of having dental problems.

(ii) Breed – small dogs are more likely to have poorly aligned or overcrowded teeth. This makes keeping their
teeth clean harder, which in turn leads to dental disease.

(iii) Food – feeding soft and sticky foods and tit-bits in the diet increases the chance of plaque build up on the teeth.

As a dog owner you can reduce the chance of dental disease developing or delay its onset quite easily by brushing your dog’s teeth using specially prepared toothpaste and toothbrushes for dogs. Also feeding special formulated dry pet foods with large pieces of kibble that are designed to wipe the teeth clean and remove plaque and tartar as your dog eats them helps reduce dental disease. Your local veterinarian can help tailor a dental program for your dog that will best help you to reduce the development of dental disease in your dog.

Nutrition and body weight
Premium foods represent the best possible balanced foods available. Unlike commercial foods, which only meet the minimum daily requirement, the premium foods are designed to meet the optimal nutritional requirements for the various life stages of your pet. Premium foods are much more digestible, requiring a smaller amount to be fed and resulting in much smaller and firmer stool volumes. Premium foods feature added omega 3 and six fatty acids that help in keeping the coat healthy, minimising shedding and helping prevent against skin conditions. Premium foods also promote healthy bacteria in the bowel decreasing the incidence of gastrointestinal disturbances. Your local vet will be happy to advise you concerning the best food for your pets.

Annual vaccination
The AVA has been reviewing its current recommendations for annual vaccination for dogs. In the meantime, Karen Hedberg, the Chair of the ANKC Canine Health Committee has provided the following information:

The core vaccines of Distemper, Hepatitis and Parvovirus require a 12-15 month follow up after the puppy vaccinations, and thereafter these can be given every 3-4 years. However, it is probably wise to vaccinate breeding bitches at least every two years to keep their titre levels high for coverage of puppies up to first vaccination age.

Non core vaccines, which include kennel cough, can be shorter lasting vaccines and should be done on an annual basis if the dog is under threat (kennel cough outbreak) or when you are placing the dog in a high-threat situation eg.going into a commercial boarding kennel. If not under threat, they are generally not required as they are generally non lethal infections.

Other vaccines such as Leptospirosis, Tetanus etc are generally only considered in the face of an outbreak of that diseases or due to local known conditions where the use of these vaccines is advisable.

Care of the older dog
When is a dog old? Around the age of seven years dogs begin to enter... [Read more](http://www.dogsvictoria.org.au/Portals/0/assets/caring/care%20of%20the%20older%20dog.pdf)

Barking dogs
Dogs ACT offers tips on how to ensure that your dog is a welcomed member of your community. Here are a few tips on how to ensure that your dog does not bark continuously and upset your neighbours.

Why dogs bark Barking is a perfectly normal and natural canine behaviour. Together with whining and growling and bodily gestures like wagging their tail and licking – it is the way that dogs communicate with each other. If you own a dog, you should expect it to bark occasionally. It is unrealistic to think you can train your dog to stop barking altogether. However, it is not acceptable for your dog to bark continuously all day and all night. You and your neighbours will be much happier if the barking is under control.

Dogs that bark do so for a variety of reasons:

* Boredom and frustration – to alleviate these problems dogs begin barking, often with the owner running out of the house to scold the dog or yelling at it from inside the house to ‘shut up’. As far as the dog is concerned, it has achieved what it wanted. Some attention even if it is a scolding is better than no attention at all.
* Loneliness – dogs that are socially isolated or confined for long periods of time alone will bark because they need some form of outlet for their pent-up energy. Dogs left alone all day will take up barking as a call for company and before long it becomes a habit. • Fear and excitement – dogs will bark excitedly when a stranger comes to the door or as an instinctive warning of an intruder or when a dog senses a threat. Barking is their outlet, which helps to release tension for a dog.
* Fun – some dogs will bark just for the sheer fun of it and just like loud music it can be very unpleasant for human neighbours.

How to stop uncontrolled barking. The first step is recognising that most dogs bark because they are lonely, bored, frustrated, frightened, excited, or alerting us to danger. These are all situations that an owner can alleviate. If you think you have a dog that may be upsetting the neighbourhood, there are a number of steps that can be taken to reduce the problem.

Some helpful hints to stop uncontrolled barking are:

* A well-exercised happy dog is more likely to sleep all day while its owners are not at home, so spend time playing with the dog. Even if you have a large yard, you still need to give your dog fun things to occupy itself such as a digging pit or a special chew toy.
* If your dog spends most of its time alone in the back yard, it will need ‘social exercise’ – the opportunity to walk around the neighbourhood, so that it can investigate and identify all the sounds and smells that tantalise the dog when it is in its yard.
* If possible, bring the dog into your house when you are at home. This will help your dog to feel a part of its family or ‘pack’ and not a distant relation. It is extremely important to get on the floor and have fun with your canine companion.
* Obedience training is great fun for the whole family and is terrific mental exercise for your dog. Most dogs really enjoy rapid play ‘trailing’ games of ‘heel’, ‘sit’, ‘down’, ‘stand’, and ‘come’ for hugs, massage, and a celebration of praise and treats. Never allow training to become dull – always make it fun and interesting.
* Dogs are ‘social’ animals and need regular companionship. Taking your dog to the park daily or weekly to make doggy friends will make a big difference. Dogs romping and playing together tire rapidly and will sleep happily while they recover. If possible, get another dog to keep your dog company, it doesn’t matter what breed, although two dogs of the opposite sex usually make the best companions.
* One of the simplest ways to teach a dog NOT to do something is to teach the dog to do it on command. In this case, teach the dog to ‘bark’, ‘speak’ or ‘talk’ on command. Once the dog has been taught the meaning of the word, use the command ‘no speak’ when you want the dog to be quiet.
* Sometimes puppies will bark because they are separated from you (their pack). Pups will eventually settle down if you DO NOT respond to their barking. If you call out or visit them while they are barking, they will be rewarded for barking and continue to do so, so it is important to be strong and not give in.
* If the family dog is barking because it is warning of a possible intruder, acknowledge the dog and say calmly ‘oh good dog...go to your kennel now… well done’. After all many people want their dog to be a guard dog and the dog simply wants its pack to be alerted to the danger. There is no point yelling at the dog to ‘shut up’ as the dog only thinks its owner is joining in on the alert. Once the danger has been acknowledged, the dog will be satisfied and will usually shut up. If you continue to have problems, another option is to consult your vet or local obedience training club for some special advice. Please feel free to contact Dogs ACT for further advice on what you can do to deal with a problem ‘barker’.