

Dog Safety at the Veterinarian: Preparing for Visits



Karen Peak

The Safe Kids/Safe Dogs Project

From the perspective of our dogs, veterinary clinics are an assault on the senses and places of stress. It is our responsibility to prepare our dogs for such visits. Here are some tips:

- ❖ Include trips to the clinic as part of socializing session: walk around the grounds, have staff feed and pat your dog, play in the grassy areas, etc. Do this weekly. If trips to the clinic are viewed as a fun time, the actual exam visit will be less stressing.
- ❖ A dog must calmly tolerate being around **controlled** animals. Do not punish stress; this will increase your dog's stress. Reward the dog focusing on you, ignoring things and being calmer. Expecting a dog tolerate strange dogs jumping on him, getting in his face or children charging up to say "Hi", especially when the dog is stressed or hurting, is not fair. At the clinic, if there are out of control dogs, dogs at the end of retracting leads, children running and screaming, etc., advocate for your dog. Ask for personal space, ask staff to intervene or wait outside. As you expect others to respect you, **show the same courtesy**.
- ❖ Dogs will not accept body handling unless taught this is a good thing. Lots of encouragement and positive associations for this! Smaller and medium sized dogs must be acclimated to being examined on a table.
- ❖ Exam tables are cold and slippery; a nonslip surface can help make your dog feel more secure so bring a small mat or carpet remnant. If someone enters the room with a hearty "Hey pup!" your dog may startle. Ask for your dog to be given a moment to observe and receive a treat as part of a quiet introduction. If your dog is aggressing, a muzzle may be suggested, this is for safety. Ask for a trainer referral and work with your dog before the next visit.



**The better prepared your dog, the safer the experience.
A good trainer can help you prepare your dog for veterinary visits!**

This may be reproduced in its entirety for educational purposes. It may be used in part with proper credit given. This is no substitute for working with a trainer and was created to help owners think and open lines of dialogue with the people they seek for assistance. ©2011 The Safe Kids/Safe Dogs Project www.SafeKidsSafeDogs.com