

use word-of-mouth to start your search. If the veterinarian's personality makes you uncomfortable, hindering your ability to explain your concerns, find another one.

Vaccinations: Some of the most common vaccinations produce immunity to distemper, hepatitis, leptospirosis, parvovirus, and parainfluenza. Puppies receive a series of these shots until they reach the proper degree of immunity, around three or four months old. Your dog will require regular booster shots and rabies shots as required by your state law.

Parasites: Gastrointestinal parasites are common in puppies. They are easy to treat if caught promptly. Left untreated, they can cause serious harm. Your vet may ask you to submit stool samples from your dog during routine visits to keep these parasites in check.

Another common parasite is heartworm. The heartworm gains entry through the bite of an infected mosquito. Heartworms can be life-

threatening if left untreated. Veterinarians usually dispense preventative drugs whenever mosquitoes are active. A heartworm test must precede the medication.

Spay/Neuter: Spaying (for females) or neutering (for males) is a surgical procedure that makes your dog unable to reproduce. If you don't plan to breed your dog or compete in the show ring, you should strongly consider spaying/neutering your dog. There are many benefits to spaying/neutering including preventing unwanted litters and overall health.

Exercise

Your dog needs regular exercise to stay fit and healthy. The amount of exercise your dog needs depends on its age, health, breed and temperament. Consider playing fetch, swimming or hiking or try an AKC event such as agility or coursing ability tests. Activities you and your dog enjoy regularly are the best.

For more information about responsible dog ownership, visit the AKC web site at:

www.akc.org



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