

Living with an Intact Male Dog

The BC SPCA normally requires that all cats, dogs, and rabbits 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 allow owners to take them in for spay/neuter when regular vet services resume in their communities.

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 in BC, so please take the earliest opportunity to have your new dog neutered when elective vet services are available again.

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 behaviour 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 Male 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

Intact dogs are at increased risk for urine marking. In male dogs, urine marking usually follows this pattern: the dog will approach a vertical surface, sniff it, turn around to lift one leg, and spray a small amount of urine on the vertical surface. This behaviour is more common outdoors where there are lots of other dogs marking, but some dogs may be prone to engaging in the behaviour indoors as well.

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 behaviour. Neutering is the most effective treatment for urine marking – over 95% of male dogs will stop problematic urine marking when neutered.

If your dog is producing more urine than usual, if urine has a pink or red colour, or if they seem to be stressed or in pain when urinating, there could be something medical going on. Contact your veterinarian.

Humping

One embarrassing (but natural) behavior that some intact male dogs sometimes engage in is humping. They may hump other dogs, people, or even objects such as furniture. It is important to work on training with intact male dogs before you need it, so you can use practiced cues such as Recall and Sit to distract dogs from humping. Once you have your dog's attention, give them another activity to occupy them, such as a puzzle feeder, training session, or a nice walk/play session outdoors.

It is important not to allow the dog to continue the humping behaviour, as it can be self-rewarding, so always find a way to positively interrupt the behaviour. Do not punish the dog for humping as it is a natural behaviour they are hormonally motivated to perform. Distraction with a previously-trained cue is the best response. Working on lots of rewards-based training with your dog throughout the day will maximize your chances of being able to interrupt humping behaviour with a trained cue.

Roaming/Interest in Intact Females

Intact male dogs are hormonally motivated to roam, especially if there is an intact female anywhere within sniffing distance (farther than you might think). Off-leash training and hiking in unenclosed areas may have to be avoided until they can be neutered. Make sure yards are secure and always use a leash on walks.

For more information, please visit: <https://spca.bc.ca/faqs/%E2%80%8Bhow-will-spaying-or-neutering-help-my-pet/>