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**PEDIATRIC STERILIZATION FAQ**

**What is pediatric sterilization?**

Pediatric sterilization refers to spaying or neutering a puppy or kitten between eight weeks and four months of age. This is younger than the traditional 5 to 6 months of age often suggested for these procedures.

**What are the benefits of sterilization at such a young age?**

The biggest advantage of pediatric sterilization is that shelter and rescue organizations are able to have all of their animals spayed or neutered prior to adoption, which guarantees they can never go out and reproduce. Without pediatric sterilization, kittens and puppies would either have to stay in the sheltering environment for many months waiting until they were old enough for surgery, or be adopted out intact, which would lead to many unwanted litters.

**What are the surgical and medical risks?**

In general, there is no increased surgical risk for pediatric patients. In fact, since pediatric surgeries are normally faster and easier than those performed in older animals, many veterinarians consider them to actually be of lower overall risk. On the medical side, while some studies do suggest that there may be a link between the age at sterilization and certain health conditions, the results are still contradictory and inconclusive. The long term health of dogs and cats depends on so many factors that determining a true link and its significance is very difficult, and at this point, there are no suggested risks that would outweigh the benefits of early sterilization in sheltering situations.

**Why is pediatric sterilization not recommended for all pets?**

In a sheltering environment, the needs of the entire group must often be considered first - ensuring every dog or cat is spayed or neutered prior to adoption is of the highest priority. Small, potential risks in the future health of an individual animal are not enough to outweigh the benefits of early spay/neuter in these situations.

In a home environment, however, the urgency of sterilization becomes less important. Many owners and veterinarians are not comfortable with early spay/neuter due to potential future risks, and even surgeries at the traditional age are being questioned and delayed. Since pediatric sterilization is not considered mainstream, it is generally not recommended outside of sheltering situations.

**What type of obstacles can shelter and rescue groups face with pediatric sterilization?**

In some areas, groups may find it difficult to locate a veterinarian that is willing to perform early spay and neuter surgeries. Many times this is either due to concern for the long term medical health of the animals, or due to a lack of comfort dealing with such young patients in surgery. Many resources are available for veterinarians to help increase both knowledge and comfort with early age sterilization procedures.

Groups may also face some resistance from the public when adopting out young kittens and puppies that have already had surgery. Most of this resistance comes from people having previous experience with spaying and neutering being recommended at the traditional age by their veterinarian, as well as a lack of understanding about the differences that exist for animals in a shelter environment. Explaining the reasoning behind the early surgeries and the lack of evidence to support any increased risks is usually enough to ease the mind of most individuals.

Dr. Kim Yuill, Prince George Spay/Neuter Clinic