



# Association of Shelter Veterinarians

## Early-Age Spay-Neuter of Dogs and Cats

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The Association of Shelter Veterinarians supports early-age (i.e., 6 to 18 weeks of age) sterilization of dogs and cats as part of a comprehensive non-lethal population control strategy. The veterinary surgeon should use discretion regarding patient selection, taking into account the availability of staff expertise and equipment to care for pediatric surgical patients. In some cases, privately owned pets may best be served by scheduling surgery at 18 weeks of age or older to allow time for the development of immunity through vaccination.

Numerous scientific studies performed to evaluate the effects of early-age spay-neuter suggest that the procedure is not associated with serious health problems and is medically sound.<sup>1-6</sup> Early age spay-neuter offers many advantages including safe anesthetic and surgical techniques, shorter surgical and recovery times, and avoidance of the stresses and costs associated with spaying while in heat, pregnant or with uterine disease. There are also numerous long-term physical and behavioral health benefits including reduced risk of pyometra and mammary tumors, elimination of testicular and ovarian tumors, and a reduction in undesirable reproductive behaviors.<sup>1,6,7</sup>

Neutering prior to sexual maturity is strongly recommended to ameliorate pet overpopulation, prevent the birth of unintended litters, and ensure compliance with legal and organizational contractual obligations.<sup>8-9</sup> In addition, being sexually intact has been identified as the leading risk factor for owner relinquishment of cats and dogs;<sup>10-14</sup> therefore, neutering prior to adoption is likely to improve the odds that adopted animals will be retained in their homes. Early-age spay-neuter helps combat the single largest killer of dogs and cats: overpopulation and euthanasia of unwanted, homeless pets.

### References

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