

Our neutering policy at Springfield

Deciding when to neuter your male dog can often seem like a bit of a minefield, particularly with strong and differing views available online. Here at Springfield, we have chosen not to operate a "one-size fits all" policy and it all depends on the individual dog.

While we do support neutering as standard in general for social dogs (and by that we mean dogs that attend day-care or are just generally around other dogs in a social setting such as a park), we don't have a blanket policy for dogs to be neutered by a set age, as it just doesn't make sense. The best time to neuter depends on a whole multitude of things and as such, we will always make recommendations and decisions based only on that individual dog, the behaviour they are demonstrating, and what we think is best for them.

To give a starting point, unless you have a large breed dog (where research shows that neutering before 12 months increases risk of joint disease) pups will be fine to be neutered from 6-7 months old and this is when many choose to book their dogs in for the op. We don't recommend neutering any younger than 6 months.

As the testosterone levels in male dogs starts to rise, we generally start to see a change in behaviour as their true personality gets swamped by hormones. This starts to show itself by dogs humping, territory marking (this can be upwards of 20 incidents in a half-day session), guarding, becoming fixated on other dogs, becoming stressed and vocal and ultimately (if left unchanged) becoming 'spikey' and aggressive with other dogs. None of this is suited to a harmonious social environment such as day-care, and importantly- none of this is nice for that dog either.

This change in behaviour almost always happens within day-care first, as this is the place where they are around other dogs that they feel most comfortable and settled. It is very common for this to come as a surprise when we tell owners because they haven't seen it themselves in other social settings such as the park, visiting a friend with a dog or in the home. This is totally normal, but does sometimes make it difficult to explain to owners that the problem is on the horizon and now is the time to act before it gets worse and spills into those other settings.

At Springfield, we are determined to provide the safest, friendliest, and most sociable environment for all our dogs to be in. As such, we welcome unneutered dogs under the following conditions:

- they are not excessively humping
- they are not habitual territory markers
- they are not displaying dominant behaviour
- they are not causing dominant behaviours from other dogs due to their intact status
- they are not creating an unsafe play environment
- their presence is not reducing the overall peacefulness and enjoyment of the group

All dogs are constantly monitored when they are in day-care, but as male dogs reach 6-7 months of age we keep an extra careful eye on them to watch out for the behaviour listed above. If/ when these do start to show, we'll let you know through the following stages:

- **Stage 1:** Their behaviour is naturally starting to shift, and we are starting to see infrequent examples of the list above during their time within day-care. Now is the time to start thinking about neutering- if your pup is over 7 months and is not a large breed dog, we would recommend getting them booked in for neutering.
- **Stage 2:** Their behaviour has progressed, and we are now seeing these issues more frequently and it is preventing them from fully enjoying and flourishing in day-care- but is still

manageable in the short term. Once a dog reaches this stage, they need to be booked in for neutering as soon as possible to be able to continue coming to Springfield.

- **Stage 3:** The issues we have been seeing are now consistent and their behaviour is now disruptive and poses a risk to other dogs and is preventing them from a positive experience in day-care. They are no longer able to safely go into a group day-care environment. They must be booked in for neutering right away or sadly will need to cancel their membership with Springfield.

If we have to let your intact male dog go, please don't be offended. The safety and enjoyment of all the dogs is our only driver in the decision. If you later change your mind and do decide to neuter, we are always happy to re-assess.

It's important to keep in mind that behaviour changes can progress quickly, and dogs can go from stage 1 to stage 3 in a very short space of time. Stage 1 is always the most sensible time to take action to make sure that negative hormonal behaviour traits don't become learned behaviour- something that will cause a bigger and longer- term problem for your dog as it is less likely to change even after neutering.

Remember that when speaking to your vet about neutering, it's important to explain to them that they attend a social day-care and that they are displaying these behaviours within that setting so that your vet's advice to neuter is based on this rather than a blanket policy, or one based only on age. A good vet should take this into consideration when advising on neutering and should not recommend delaying to a certain arbitrary age (other than for welfare reasons) if these problems have already developed.

If you have reservations about neutering your dog, please speak to us about them. Whilst the vast majority of owners choose to surgically neuter their dogs, if you want to test the water beforehand to see what effects it has- chemically neutering is a great alternative. This is an implant which is a hormonal chip which is placed under the dog's skin and that lasts either 6 months or 12 months (there are 2 different size chips) that provides the same result as surgically neutering your dog, but means that it can be left to expire if it doesn't have the desired effect on behaviour within day-care and social environments. There is no need to anaesthetise your dog and typically, the chip will be fully effective after about 6 weeks. We do not recommend the chemical option if you plan to breed as there is always a risk on long term fertility. If you do go for the chemical option, you must make sure that you keep up with this each time they come to expire, or have them fully neutered in place of the implant, for your dog to be able to keep coming to Springfield.

With female dogs, the general recommendation from vets is to have your pup spayed after 6 months old, either before they come into season, or after their first season- whichever you personally prefer. Un-spayed female dogs are very welcome in day-care, apart from when they are in season. During this time, they need to be kept out of group play to prevent any unwanted pregnancies and to prevent the boys going wild! If you choose not to spay your female dog, this is absolutely fine- you'll just need to factor in that they won't be able to attend day-care during each season. On average female dogs come into season every 6 months but this can vary especially in the beginning so it's a good idea to keep track. A season will usually last 2-3 weeks from start to finish.