

Dog Park Dangers:

Dog parks are becoming more and more popular throughout big cities. They give owners the opportunity to let their dogs play off leash -- especially helpful if owners live in the city -- and dogs are able to socialize and play in an enclosed environment. The overall idea is a good one; however, it doesn't account for dog (and owner!) temperaments. Before taking your pet to the dog park, consider these five dog park precautions.

1. Aggressive Dogs

One of the main troubles about going to a dog park is not knowing the temperaments of the other dogs. Your dog might be friendly, but that doesn't mean other dogs won't still be aggressive. Dog fights are a common concern in dog parks, and rightfully so. Although there is no way of knowing for sure if the other dogs are going to be aggressive, there are a few ways to prepare in advance before bringing your dog into a new environment.

First, visit the dog park without your pet. Observe the overall atmosphere, and visit at different times of day to see when it is the busiest. If your dog is new to the dog park, make sure to go during off hours, when there aren't as many dogs. That way, you'll have more control over your pet and the surrounding dogs.

Also, make sure the dogs in the dog park aren't in pack mentality. If owners are bringing their dogs at the same time of the day each day, their dogs know each other and have most likely formed a bond. By bringing a new dog into the mix, the pack might become aggressive to the newcomer, much like any pack of animals. If you see dogs running in a large group, try bringing your dog at a different time of the day to avoid any confrontation.

2. Irresponsible Owners

Oftentimes, a dog is the result of its owner. This can be good or bad. Whereas a well-trained dog likely has a responsible owner, an out-of-control dog might have an owner who is less likely to take responsibility for the dog's actions. Dog owners should know their pets well enough to decide whether or not the dog park is the right place for their dog.

Many irresponsible pet owners think that they can simply bring their pet to the dog park and let it loose, regardless of the dog's temperament. Dog owners should be aware of where their dog is at all times within the dog park, but in some cases, once the dog is off leash, the owner no longer pays attention to what the dog is doing. If issues arise, it's best to leave the park rather than get into a confrontation with another owner over which dog is in the wrong.

3. Transmitted Diseases

While your dog should always be up-to-date on its vaccinations, it is especially important that your dog is fully vaccinated before making a trip to the dog park. Diseases can be found in soil, water, and even air, so maintaining your pet's vaccinations is incredibly important. Talk to your vet before going to the dog park, and make sure your dog has all of the vaccinations it needs. It might need additional vaccinations since it will frequently be in contact with other dogs.

Dogs need to stay hydrated while at the dog park, but the water dishes can harbor all sorts of bad bacteria. Bring your own water bowl so your dog can get a quick drink without the added dangers.

Also, make sure your pet is neutered or spayed before visiting the dog park. Not only are unaltered dogs typically more aggressive than their spayed/neutered counterparts, but you also don't want to end up with a litter of puppies a few months after the dog park visit!

TIP: Make sure to bring a bag to clean up after your dog. Some parks offer a bag station, but bring your own just in case the station hasn't been restocked.

4. Doggie Division

A dog park that allows all sizes of dogs should be entered with caution. Many dog parks have a separate area where only smaller breeds are allowed. This gives you the option to bring your smaller breed into the larger area, but still gives your pet a safe option to steer clear of the bigger dogs. It should be noted that an altercation between a small dog and a big dog could result in fatality.

The main goal is to keep your dog safe -- and chances are, your dog will have fun regardless of whether it's in the big dog area or not! If your small dog prefers to play with bigger dogs or vice versa, consider setting up playdates with other owners so your dogs can be monitored in a more confined setting.

5. Cost and Maintenance

Though not necessarily a danger, most dog parks cost money to attend. Depending on the location, dog parks require licenses and current immunization records. However, if there isn't someone regulating the dog park, you might wind up with dogs that are not currently licensed for that city or are not up-to-date on their vaccinations, which can be dangerous to your dog.

Also, regular maintenance to a dog park is necessary so your dog is safe in the environment. If you frequent a dog park, make it a habit to walk the perimeter to make sure there are no potential escape routes.

Dog parks can be a fun way for your pet to get out and explore with other canines. By knowing these common dog park dangers and taking care of any issues before they arise, you can help keep your dog, yourself, and others safe!