

# PET

## WELLNESS

MAY 2025

SASKATOON  
STARPHOENIX

### DOG PARK 101

Page 8

### Beware: Top toxins for cats and dogs

Page 19



# PET LICENSING

## LICENSING PROVIDES PEACE OF MIND!

If your pet ever escapes, a valid pet license provides identification, safe shelter and direct return home.

Purchase or renew your pet license online at [saskatoon.ca/petlicensing](https://saskatoon.ca/petlicensing) or visit one of our pet license vendors.

### VENDORS

**Animal Pound**  
5028 Clarence Avenue S.

**Cumberland Veterinary Clinic**  
#20 - 1010 Taylor Street E.

**Early's Farm & Garden Centre**  
2615 Lorne Avenue

**Early's Farm & Garden Centre**  
502 51st Street E.

**Erindale Animal Hospital**  
#11 - 410 Ludlow Street

**Pet Planet**  
40 - 1519 8th Street

**Saskatoon SPCA**  
2250 Hanselman Avenue

2025

## SASKATOON'S TOP PET NAMES

1. Buddy
2. Max
3. Charlie



1. Luna
2. Tigger
3. Kitty



## PET LICENSING FEES

### DOG

Spayed/Neutered .....	\$36
Not Spayed or Neutered.....	\$73.50
Juvenile (Under 1 Year) .....	\$36
Replacement Tag .....	\$11

### CAT

Spayed/Neutered .....	\$22.50
Not Spayed or Neutered.....	\$50
Juvenile (Under 1 Year)...	\$22.50
Replacement Tag .....	\$11

## DOG PARKS

- ☒ Are you passionate about dogs?
- ☒ Do you regularly visit dog parks?
- ☒ Do you like to connect with other dog owners?

## Become a Dog Park Ambassador!

- No hourly commitment—volunteer as often as you like
- Orientation and safety training included
- Help create a positive culture of community
- Encourage users to practice responsible dog ownership principles

Call 306.975.8478 or visit [saskatoon.ca/dogparks](https://saskatoon.ca/dogparks) for more information or to sign up today.



# PET WELLNESS

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Pet license vendors	2	Be a good pet neighbour	16
Be your pet's best friend	4	Do your homework before bringing home a new pet	18
Lost pet? Here's what to do	7	Beware: Top toxins for pets	19
Dog park 101	8	Senior pets require extra TLC	20
City of Saskatoon dog park map	9	The power of connection between humans and animals	21
Agency embraces expanded role in animal welfare	10	Health alert: Veterinarians warn of the dangers of parvovirus	22
Cats in crisis	14		

# PET WELLNESS

### EDITOR

Jeannie Armstrong

### WRITERS

Jenny Gabruch

Jennifer Jacoby-Smith

Ray Penner

Meghanne Uptigrove

### DESIGNER

Billie Biggs

THIS SECTION WAS CREATED BY CONTENT WORKS, POSTMEDIA'S COMMERCIAL CONTENT DIVISION

# PET LICENSING

Cat licenses as  
low as \$22.50/year.





# Be your pet's best friend:

## Responsible pet ownership starts with licensing your cat or dog



Regular maintenance and upgrades enhance users' dog park experiences. In 2025, the pathways at Chief Whitecap dog park will be upgraded. (PHOTO: CITY OF SASKATOON)

BY JEANNIE ARMSTRONG

Pets give us unconditional love. In turn, owners want their furry friends to have happy, fulfilling lives.

Responsible pet ownership benefits everyone in our community: animals and humans alike. The City of Saskatoon Animal Services team has a mission to promote and support responsible pet ownership by providing a diverse range of programs and supports.

These initiatives include the development and maintenance of off-leash dog parks, funding of the Subsidized Spay and Neuter Program (SSNP), hosting pet-friendly events and overseeing contracts for Bylaw enforcement and pound-keeping services.

### LICENSE YOUR PET EVERY YEAR

Fundamental to responsible pet ownership is the requirement to license your cat or dog annually with the City of Saskatoon.

There are so many benefits to licensing your pet, says Melissa Meacham, open space consultant with the Saskatoon Animal Services team.

A pet license serves as an important means of identification for your cat or dog. If your animal escapes from its home and is running at large, a pet license helps animal control officers provide the cat or dog with a safe return home.

If the cat or dog is microchipped, that information can be entered in the Animal

Service license database, making it even easier for officers to reunite the pet with its owner. The pet owner can enter up to three contact numbers in the database, as well as two additional contacts such as a family member or friend.

Pet owners who license their animals can also benefit from the Pet At Large (PAL) Perk, described as a 'get out of jail free' provision, redeemable once during the pet's lifetime. When the PAL Perk is applied, it covers the \$100 fine for running at large, so the animal can be returned home at no cost. If the owner can't be reached and the animal is taken to the City of Saskatoon Pound for safekeeping, the PAL Perk can also be applied to the impound fee (once per year).



It's easier than ever to ensure your dog or cat has a valid pet license. One convenient way is to purchase or renew your license online at [saskatoon.ca/petsonline](https://saskatoon.ca/petsonline). Pet licenses can also be purchased in person at City Hall or from participating vendors (listed on page 2 of this guide).

There has been a slight increase in the fees charged for pet licenses in 2025, reflective of rising costs.

The fee for licensing a spayed/neutered dog is \$36. If the dog has not been spayed/neutered, the fee is \$73.50. The fee for a juvenile dog, under one year of age, is \$36.

The fee for a spayed/neutered cat is \$22.50; an intact cat's license is \$50. The license fee for a juvenile cat, under one year of age, is \$22.50.

"We put those funds back into our programs, whether it's dog park development and programming, the SSNP initiative or the city-wide events that pet owners can enjoy," says Meacham.

### DOG PARKS POPULAR

Off-leash parks are a great way to exercise with your dog, while socializing with other canines and people in your community. Meacham reports there were over 1-million visits to Saskatoon's off-leash parks in 2024, pointing to the popularity of the off-leash sites.

The City of Saskatoon has developed and maintains 13 dog parks in and around Saskatoon, ranging from small urban parks such as Hyde Park and Caswell to large off-leash areas like Sutherland Beach and Chief Whitecap.

A valid license is required to access the off-leash parks. It's also important to be a responsible dog owner and comply with the rules that are displayed at the entrance of each dog park, including having a valid pet license, picking up the animal's poop, and keeping the dog on its leash when entering and exiting the dog park, including the parking lot.

### BEHAVIOUR AWARENESS

Based on the success of a pilot program first introduced two years ago, Animal Services will once again be offering behaviour awareness training sessions at the dog parks, from the May long weekend through to the end of September.

"Our goal is for everyone to have a good experience with their dogs when visiting the off-leash parks," says Meacham.

During each session, the trainer provides 30 minutes of instruction, followed by a 15-minute question-and-answer period. "A lot of the information will focus on responsible pet ownership, including tips on how to enter and exit the dog park properly, and when to correct your dog and intervene before there is a conflict with another dog. Maintaining control of your dog is important. We ask every dog owner to keep their leash with them at all times, even in the off-leash area. If your pet isn't responding to voice commands, then having that leash there is a very helpful tool in regaining control of your dog," says Meacham.

### DOG PARK UPGRADES

The Animal Services team is always striving to enhance users' dog park experiences, including completing needed maintenance and upgrades to off-leash areas.

Meacham says that new boundary markers have been installed along the south perimeter of the Silverwood dog park. "We'll also be installing additional permanent garbage bins throughout the Silverwood park this year."

This year will also see upgrades to some of the pathways at Chief Whitecap dog park. "We will be extending the crusher dust pathway that runs along the treeline. The goal is to have that completed before year end," says Meacham. "We're also hoping to make some small amenity improvements at the parks, adding naturalized seating using



Through to the end of September 2025, Animal Services will once again offer behaviour awareness training sessions at select off-leash areas. The goal is to ensure everyone has a great experience at the dog park.

(PHOTO: CITY OF SASKATOON)

large rocks as rest spots, to achieve a more natural aesthetic, instead of benches."

The possibility of developing additional small dog off-leash areas is also under discussion. Meacham says that the off-leash areas developed for the exclusive use of small breed dogs, adjacent to the Hyde Park and Charlottetown dog parks, have proven very successful. "We've had good feedback from our small dog park users.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

**PET**  
LICENSING

**Dog licenses as  
low as \$36/year.**





The parks are always quite busy. Additional small dog parks are on our wish list for the future.”

Important feedback also comes from designated dog park ambassadors. These community volunteers monitor conditions in the off-leash parks and provide insight into needed improvements. “Dog park ambassadors act as our eyes and ears, letting us know about any issues we need to be aware of. They also act as liaisons with the community. We’d really like to encourage more people to volunteer for the dog park ambassador program,” says Meacham.

To become a dog park ambassador, call Saskatoon Animal Services at 306-975-8478, email [animal.services@saskatoon.ca](mailto:animal.services@saskatoon.ca), or visit [saskatoon.ca/dogparks](http://saskatoon.ca/dogparks).

### SSNP PROGRAM EXPANDS

Revenue from licensing also helps fund the Subsidized Spay and Neuter (SSNP) program, which gives lower-income pet owners access to discounted spay/neuter services.

“We were able to increase funding to the SSNP program this year and are hoping to provide services for more families who aren’t able to afford spay/neuter services. Last year, we also added microchipping to that service. If the dog or cat isn’t already licensed within our system, we’ll also provide a license for that animal for one year. After that, it is the responsibility of the owner to renew the license,” says Meacham.

Pet owners interested in accessing the SSNP program can download the online application form and send it to the Animal Services team for evaluation. Proof of income and residency is required.

“Last year, we had over 280 approved applications. With the additional funding this year, our goal is to get over 300 animals spayed or neutered,” says Meacham.

The SSNP program is one way to address the pet overpopulation crisis in our city, adds Meacham. “One of the reasons it’s such a successful program is due to the participating veterinarians who provide excellent care and service to the applicants.”

### BYLAW REVIEW

Many of the principles of responsible pet ownership are identified in the City of Saskatoon’s Animal Control Bylaw and Dangerous Animal Bylaw. These bylaws are reviewed on a regular basis by City administration and the Animal Services Working Group, which is comprised of

forward request from a member of the public regarding setting household limits on animals within a residential home. We surveyed 22 Canadian municipalities and it was determined that there are already enforcement agencies in place to address animal welfare and animal hoarding concerns through Saskatchewan Animal



Responsible pet owners license their dog or cat annually, to provide their loved one with a reliable means of identification and a safe return home if the animal is lost. They also protect their cats and dogs by not letting them run at large. (PHOTO: CITY OF SASKATOON)

animal experts and citizen representatives. The Saskatoon Animal Control Agency is contracted by the City to enforce the bylaws.

“The most recent Animal Control Bylaw review was approved on March 6, 2025. One of the amendments that was approved involved not allowing any animals other than dogs in off-leash areas. This amendment was the result of feedback from the public, regarding riders bringing horses into the Chief Whitecap off-leash area. That was leading to some conflicts between dogs and the horses,” says Meacham.

A regulation was also added prohibiting a person from providing false information when applying for a pet license.

“Additionally reported on was a bring-

Protection Services,” says Meacham.

“Our focus remains on responsible pet ownership and directing residents to the designated agencies that are in place.”

### LEARN MORE

Helpful information for pet owners is easily accessible, by visiting the City of Saskatoon’s Animal Services web pages ([saskatoon.ca/animalservices](http://saskatoon.ca/animalservices)).

Pet Wellness is another great resource for pet owners. Now in its 11th year, the annual free print publication is produced by the Saskatoon StarPhoenix on behalf of Saskatoon Animal Services. This helpful guide, featuring advice and tips from local animal experts, is distributed through the StarPhoenix, at Saskatoon City Hall, City of Saskatoon Leisure Centres and online at [saskatoon.ca/animalservices](http://saskatoon.ca/animalservices).



# Lost Pet? Here's what to do

To reunite with your furry family member as quickly as possible, try these helpful tips

BY JENNIFER JACOBY-SMITH

Last year, Saskatoon animal lovers were captivated by the story of Bella, the Pomeranian who went missing from a groomer's salon. Even worse, the little pup bolted in the midst of one of winter's worst storms.

Five excruciating days later Bella was reunited with her owners.

Even with the happy ending, it's the kind of story that makes a pet owner's heart race, imagining their own little fluffball alone in a great big world.

So what should you do if your pet goes missing?

"The first thing (pet owners) should do is give us a call," says Eva Alexandrovici, president of Saskatoon Animal Control Agency (SACA). Alexandrovici says often the agency fields a call from someone who's found a pet before the owner calls to report them missing. Sometimes they can make a match quickly over the phone.

Amber Matthews, director of animal care at the Saskatoon SPCA agrees. "Don't wait to start looking, hoping that your pet will make its way back to you. Immediately file lost reports with local bylaw enforcement and the animal shelter and provide a clear, recent photo." Matthews suggests visiting both agencies in person if your pet is difficult to identify.

Bylaw enforcement is done by the Saskatoon Animal Control Agency. Pet owners can file a report at [saskatoonanimalcontrol.ca](http://saskatoonanimalcontrol.ca) by clicking on the "Lost and Found" tab. The form has space to include the pet's name, description, identifying tags, where the pet went missing and a recent photo.

If your animal is not found immediately, Alexandrovici recommends owners put something outdoors that has the pet's scent, such as a blanket or a litter box. This is especially helpful for missing indoor cats who have little experience outside.

Next, it's important to let as many people as possible know about your missing pet.

"Social media can be a great help with this," adds Matthews. There are two Facebook groups for missing pets in Saskatoon, run by volunteers.

"We suggest putting up posters and talking to the neighbours and letting them know that your pet is missing. Sometimes the animals don't get very far," says Alexandrovici. She adds, SACA officers often pick up animals within a block or two of where they went missing.

To reduce the risk, it's important to do everything you can to secure their environment before they go outside. Double check your fence and gates. During the winter, check snow accumulation next to fences as some adventurous pups will climb a snow pile to go rogue.

Make sure your pet has a valid City of Saskatoon dog or cat license and has identification on their collar. And, if possible, have your pet microchipped.

"Microchips offer a permanent means of identification that cannot be removed or lost like a collar," says Matthews. "Whatever form of identification you have on your pet, make sure to keep your contact information up to date. Each year, we see many animals come into care wearing ID, but the associated owner contact information is out of date and phone numbers are out of service."



Animal control officers carry a portable scanner, so they can scan animals for a microchip and quickly return them home. (PHOTO: SACA)

If you still can't find your missing pet, Matthews suggests widening your search area if you live in a rural area or on a major travel route. "Each year, we see a few animals picked up by well-meaning citizens and transported up to a few hours before they are delivered to the care of a shelter."

As for Bella's great escape, Alexandrovici says Bella's family called the Saskatoon Animal Control Agency, and the agency was able to report sightings to the family until they were ultimately reunited. "They were doing all the right things. Luckily, they were able to be reunited with their pet, which was nice to see," she says.

## Report a Lost or Found Pet:

**Saskatoon Animal Control Agency & Animal Pound**

306-385-PETS (7387)

[saskatoonanimalcontrol.ca/lost-and-found](http://saskatoonanimalcontrol.ca/lost-and-found)

**Saskatoon SPCA: 306-385-PETS (7387)**



## BECOME A DOG PARK AMBASSADOR!

### Volunteer at your local dog park.

[saskatoon.ca/dogparks](http://saskatoon.ca/dogparks)





# Dog Park 101

## What do you and your dog need to do before visiting an off-leash park?

BY JENNY GABRUCH

Saskatoon's off-leash parks are an ideal way for dogs to experience some fresh air, exercise and fun.

The City of Saskatoon has developed 13 off-leash dog parks, each with different sizes and environments, from small urban parks to larger spaces catering to wide open adventures.

One of the first steps to a great dog park experience is selecting the type of off-leash park that's best suited to you and your canine companion.

That often comes down to personal preference, says Melissa Meacham, open space consultant with the City of Saskatoon's Animal Services.

"Some enjoy a park that is closer to them, while others like to drive to a large park to have a small hike with more areas to explore with their pup," she says. "My advice would be to try out a few locations and see what works best for you and your dog."

### PARK CATEGORIES

The parks are categorized into three groups: neighbourhood, suburban and city-wide.

"Neighbourhood parks such as Caswell Hill and Fred Mendel are smaller in size and offer a space for some quick zoomies to be released," says Meacham.

"Suburban parks, such as Paul Mostaway, Pierre Radisson, Silverwood and Hyde, are larger and service a handful of neighbourhoods within the area."

City-wide parks include Avalon, Chief Whitecap, Hampton, Southwest and Sutherland, which are all more than 15 acres in size and have ample parking.

A valid City of Saskatoon dog license is required to visit any of the parks and the pooch must have up-to-date vaccinations.

Along with the size and layout of the park, consider the dog's size. There are two parks designed specifically for small dogs only: Hyde Park and Charlottetown Park. To enter the parks, dogs must weigh less than 20 pounds, with a maximum height of 16 inches at the shoulder.

Some parks are fully enclosed, while others are partially fenced.

"Not all of our dog parks are fully fenced, so depending on your dog's behaviour and recall, this is something to consider," says Meacham.

Minding dog park rules is paramount as well. That means picking up their feces, having them on leash before entering the park and keeping that leash with you at all times, making sure the dog understands basic commands and that it is not aggressive to others.

Owners should ensure their dog is in sight and under control for the safety of their pet and others.

### DOG BEHAVIOUR

Another factor to keep in mind is the dog's temperament and obedience level.

"It is important to not only be aware of your dog's behaviour and body language, but other dogs in the park as well," says Meacham. "Respect boundaries and give space to dogs who need it. Watch for signs that your dog may be tired or overstimulated."

The City of Saskatoon offers free behaviour awareness training sessions at the parks during the summer that focus on basic training tips, recognizing and understanding



The City of Saskatoon's 13 off-leash dog parks attract one million visits annually. Dogs entering the parks must have a valid pet license. (PHOTO: CITY OF SASKATOON)

dog body language and behaviour. Signage for the sessions are posted at each park.

Meacham says the City's dog park ambassador program also aims to enhance the off-leash experience.

The volunteer program is designed to assist Saskatoon Animal Services in monitoring conditions of the parks, provide input for improvements and encourage responsible pet ownership.

Saskatoon's off-leash parks are popular spots for exercise and social interaction, with an estimated 1 million visits annually.

Meacham says it's best to be prepared beforehand — know your dog and the park.

"A little planning and observation go a long way in making the off-leash experience safe and fun for everyone involved," she says.

# DOG PARKS

All dogs must have a valid pet license to access the dog parks.  
For more information on Dog Park openings & closures, visit [saskatoon.ca/dogparks](http://saskatoon.ca/dogparks).



MAP NOT  
TO SCALE



## **1 AVALON**

At the end of Broadway Avenue, south of Glasgow Street.



## **2 CASWELL**

Avenue F North or Avenue G North and 31st Street West.



## **3 CHARLOTTETOWN (SMALL DOG DOG PARK)**

Enter from the parking lot behind Cosmo Civic Centre, Laurier Drive.



## **4 CHIEF WHITECAP**

Accessed via Saskatchewan Crescent off of Cartwright Street.



## **5 FRED MENDEL**

Avenue W South and 17th Street West.



## **6 HAMPTON VILLAGE**

North of 33rd Street, along Junor Avenue, around Hampton Circle, north on Dawson Way, follow grid. Dog Park next to airport.



## **7 HYDE**

Enter North Gate from Slimmon Road. Alternate South Gate (foot traffic only).



## **8 HYDE (SMALL DOG DOG PARK)**

Enter from Slimmon Road.



## **9 PAUL MOSTOWAY**

Richardson Road, east of McClocklin Road.



## **10 PIERRE RADISSON**

Between 33rd Street and 32nd Street at Faulkner Crescent.



## **11 SILVERWOOD**

Access off Kinnear Avenue or the east end of Adilman Drive.



## **12 SOUTHWEST**

North of Cedar Villa Road off Valley Road.



## **13 SUTHERLAND BEACH**

Accessed via grid road with entry off of Central Avenue, 50 m north of Attridge Drive.

## **DOG PARKS FOR SMALL DOGS**

Dogs must be under 40 cm (16") at the shoulder and less than 9 kg (20 lbs). Dedicated spaces for small dogs available at Hyde and Charlottetown Dog Park.



# Agency **embraces** expanded role in animal welfare

It's been a year of change for the Saskatoon Animal Control Agency, as the team expands and improves services

BY JEANNIE ARMSTRONG

Since 2004, the Saskatoon Animal Control Agency has served as a passionate advocate for responsible pet ownership.

With a mission to keep humans and animals in our community safe, the agency provides animal control services as well as enforcement of the Animal Control Bylaw and the Dangerous Animal Bylaw, under contract to the City of Saskatoon.

**In 2024, Saskatoon Animal Control Agency received 4,878 calls for service, including 323 barking complains, 473 calls for bite cases or dangerous animal reports, and 3,585 confined and at-large animal calls.**

In January 2024, the agency's role was significantly expanded when it was awarded the contract to operate the City of Saskatoon Animal Pound, which has been located for many years at 5028 Clarence Avenue South. Prior to 2024, the pound had been operated in the City-owned facility through a contract for service with the Saskatoon SPCA.

"It's been a big year of change," says Heather Ens, general manager with the Saskatoon Animal Control Agency. "It's been a good year, a challenging year. Every day we move another step forward in providing better service to the community. That's always the goal: to better the program and improve on everything we do."



Staff and volunteers at the Saskatoon Animal Control Agency work hard to give animals at the shelter a good life and prepare them for adoption. (PHOTO: SACA)

Before the move took place in January 2024, extensive renovations were undertaken at the facility, which is owned by the City of Saskatoon. Upgrades were completed to the areas where dogs and cats are housed, including the addition of new animal enclosures and a new heating/ventilation system.

The added responsibilities for animal care and enforcement also meant that Saskatoon Animal Control Agency had to double its staff roster. The team of 25 initially continued to work from two different locations: the pound facility on Clarence Avenue and the bylaw enforcement office at 1925 Avenue B North.



The entire SACA team is now working under one roof, following a reconfiguration of office space at the pound facility earlier this year. In March 2025, the team's bylaw officers and dispatchers made the move to the Clarence Avenue facility.

"I'm excited to have them in the same building. It's going to be beneficial to have everyone together under the same roof. We spend a lot of time going back and forth, sharing information about the different animals. Having all of our staff within the same building streamlines operations. It also means that if there's some downtime and the bylaw officers are caught up on everything, they can join the kennel staff in giving the animals in our care some extra attention," says Ens.

A look at the statistics reveals the wide range of responsibilities that were carried out by the agency's team in the past year.

Bylaw enforcement is one of the agency's core functions. The Animal Control Bylaw regulates the licensing of cats and dogs, animals running at large, barking complaints, feces complaints, prohibited animals and bylaw offenses in off-leash parks. SACA officers also investigate complaints about dangerous or aggressive dogs and cats under the Dangerous Animal Bylaw.

"In 2024, we received 4,878 calls for service, including 323 barking complains, 473 calls for bite cases or dangerous animal reports, and 3,585 confined and at-large animal calls," says Ens.

In 2024, SACA officers picked up and impounded 2,310 animals (940 dogs and 1,370 cats) that were found at large or taken in through requests from Saskatoon Police Services.

In addition to the dogs and cats that were found running at large by field officers, 189 animals were brought to the pound facility by members of the public. An additional



When an animal arrives at the City of Saskatoon Animal Pound, a member of SACA's health-care team provides a health exam. In 2024, the agency recorded 17,021 treatments, including health checks, surgeries, veterinary checks, vaccinations, weigh-ins, behavioural checks and more. (PHOTO: SACA)

113 kittens and 25 puppies were born at the shelter, or brought in with their mothers, emphasizing for the need for owners to have their animals spayed or neutered.

Animals that are picked up by animal control officers are brought to the pound facility, where they are cared for by a support team that includes a veterinarian, veterinarian technologists and kennel staff.

SACA's primary goal is to reunite these pets with their owners. "In our first year as pound keeper and alongside our role as field officers, we returned or rehomed 1,485 animals," says Ens.

Providing that animal with a safe return home is made so much easier when the animal has a valid City of Saskatoon license. A pet license provides the agency with contact information to reach the animal's owners. Field officers will also scan the cat or dog for

a microchip, which provides another helpful means of identification. Pet owners are encouraged to link their animal's microchip information to the City of Saskatoon's license database.

"I would love to see more pet owners microchip their pets. Of all the animals we handled last year, only 218 were microchipped. Ideally, if that number was higher, we'd see a larger number of animals returned home. If you have attached that microchip identification number to your pet's license, you won't receive a 'fail to display' ticket — even if your dog or cat isn't wearing its collar and tag when it's running at large," says Ens.

Owners who fail to license their pets or renew that license annually are also subject

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

## IT'S YOUR DOODY!

Dog feces do not fertilize the ground and have negative effects on grass and plants. Be a good neighbour and clean up after your pet.





to a minimum fine of \$250.

One of the benefits that comes with a valid pet license is the Pet At Large (PAL) Perk. This provision is like a 'get out of jail free' card for a licensed pet that is found accidentally running at large. The PAL Perk can be applied (once in the pet's lifetime) to the payment of the running at large fine, which starts at \$100. If the licensed animal ends up at the pound facility, the PAL Perk can also be applied to the impound fee.

"On top of that, your valid pet license gives the owner the opportunity to register three contact numbers for themselves, and two additional contact numbers for a friend or family member. It also gives us the address, so if your animal is picked up, we will swing by your address, knock on your door to see if you're home and try to do the return that way. The goal, at the end of the day, is to get the animal back to you," says Ens.

#### LIFE AT THE SHELTER

If the owner of a cat or dog found running at large can't be identified or contacted, the animal is brought to the City of Saskatoon Pound on Clarence Avenue, now being operated by SACA.

Upon the animal's arrival, a health exam is undertaken by a member of the agency's health-care team, led by in-house veterinarian Dr. Rebecca Corrigan and a team of registered veterinary technicians.

The health exam is quite comprehensive, including vaccination and deworming to prevent the spread of disease among the animals in the agency's care. If the animal requires emergency care, it is taken to a veterinary clinic outside of the pound facility.

"In 2024, we had 17,021 treatments recorded, including health checks, surgeries, veterinary checks, boosters, follow-ups on injuries, weigh-ins, behavioural checks and notations regarding general health," says Ens.

"We're very fortunate to have the health-care team we have. They are a definite asset and have been an amazing fit for the organization."

Dogs or cats that are brought to the pound are held for 72 hours, excluding the



In 2024, SACA officers picked up and impounded 2,310 animals (940 dogs and 1,370 cats). SACA returned or rehomed 1,485 animals. (PHOTO: SACA)

day of impounding, to give the owners an opportunity to claim their pets.

Every effort is made to seek out the owners of the lost animals, including posts on the SACA website, Instagram and Facebook page featuring photos of the dogs and cats.

If the animal is not claimed by its owner, it is then assessed for adoption.

"We've seen a lot of growth in the area of adoptions, but there's still a huge need. We're working hard to make the public aware that the animals that come in that go unclaimed still need a place to go when that hold period ends. We are doing our best to find homes for as many of these animals as possible, but it's a big challenge," says Ens.

Social media, including Facebook and Instagram, has been an effective way to make the public aware of the dogs and cats that are available for adoption. "We've been working hard to get our social media going and we'd like to encourage everyone to share those posts. This has led to a number of adoptions," says Ens.

"We've also held a couple of adoption drives and will continue with those. Those costs are quite high for us, as the cost of a microchip, vaccinations and spay or neuter is included in the adoption fee of \$65 to \$100 for cats and \$295 to \$400 for dogs. It's an amazing value for the person who is looking for a pet," says Ens.

**"I would love to see more pet owners microchip their pets. Of all the animals we handled last year, only 218 were microchipped. Ideally, if that number was higher, we'd see a larger number of animals returned home."**

Heather Ens, general manager,  
Saskatoon Animal Control Agency

Finding a forever home for a cat or dog at the shelter is always celebrated, she adds. "We don't see as many dogs get adopted as we do cats. In an average week, we will sometimes see a cat adoption every day. But for dogs, we sometimes have them living at the pound facility for 30, 40 or 50 days. We'd really like to find more homes for the dogs in our care."

The SACA staff works hard to give these animals a good life and prepare them for adoption. "We put a lot of time and energy into helping the animals deal with being at the shelter mentally and physically. We have a dog run on the grounds, where the dogs can be walked daily by our staff or our volunteers. We want to get them out of their kennels as much as possible, give them some

exercise and work on basic training skills,” says Ens.

“We’ve been lucky to grow our volunteer numbers over the past year. I have volunteers who come in specifically for dogs, some for cats. We have a socialization room here, where volunteers can come in, have a cup of coffee and play with an adoptable cat, getting it out of its cage. It’s the same with adoptable dogs. They can take them out, do a walk around the shelter or go out to the off-leash area.”

Being at the pound is stressful for any animal, so having time outside of the kennel is always beneficial. “If we’ve got an animal that’s stressed, our staff will put some extra time into that specific animal, as best we can,” says Ens.

The Saskatoon Animal Control Agency is open for adoptions every day from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. Adoption counselors are available to meet with those interested in a new pet and will help people select an animal

based on their preferences, lifestyles and experiences.

To view adoptable animals and learn about upcoming adoption events, visit SACA’s website and Facebook pages.

### **VOLUNTEERS AND FOSTERS NEEDED**

If you’re interested in volunteering at the Saskatoon Animal Control Agency and spending time with the dogs and cats living there, just go to the SACA website and fill out the online application form.

There is a requirement to complete a criminal record check at the Saskatoon Police Service, which is free of charge. Once approved, volunteers then complete a short orientation program to prepare them to help out and spend time with the animals.

The tasks at the facility are never ending, says Ens, including socializing animals, cleaning kennels and cages, doing “endless amounts of laundry” and taking photos of every animal that comes into the shelter.

Another way to support the Saskatoon Animal Control Agency is by joining the foster program that was introduced in 2024. “There’s always a need for foster care providers and volunteers. A lot of times foster care is needed for kittens and puppies that aren’t old enough to be adopted and are too young to go in for their spay or neuter,” says Ens.


“Volunteers and foster care providers are really an extension of our staff. We see many of the same people on a regular basis. They’re dedicated to those animals in the same way that our staff is.”

To search for a lost dog or cat, view animals available for adoption, or learn about SACA’s volunteer or foster programs, visit [saskatoonanimalcontrol.ca](http://saskatoonanimalcontrol.ca).

## **Learn More**

[saskatoonanimalcontrol.ca](http://saskatoonanimalcontrol.ca)

 Saskatoon Animal Control Agency

 @saskatoon\_animal\_control

# **Dog Park Etiquette**

**Here are some reminders for a safe and successful off-leash experience.**

**All dogs must have a valid Pet License. Fines start at \$250.**



Purchase or renew online at [saskatoon.ca/petlicensing](http://saskatoon.ca/petlicensing).



**Bring a leash. Use when entering and exiting the Dog Park and to maintain control of your dog during your visit.**



**Keep your dog in sight and ensure you have voice command. Off-leash doesn't mean unattended.**



**Scoop your dog's poop. Bring a few extra baggies, just in case.**



**Have fun! When dogs and owners play by the rules, everyone has a good time!**

**If you have concerns about the behaviour of a dog or its owner while at the Dog Park, contact the Saskatoon Animal Control Agency at 306-385-PETS (7387).**



[saskatoon.ca/dogparks](http://saskatoon.ca/dogparks)





# Cats in Crisis

## Cat rescue agencies at full capacity as Saskatoon's homeless cat crisis mounts

BY JENNY GABRUCH

Saskatoon rescue agencies are sounding the alarm over the city's stray cat population.

Stray and unwanted cats are overwhelming the organizations, leaving them scrambling to find solutions.

Maddie Fast, a volunteer with SOS Prairie Rescue, says several factors are driving the overpopulation crisis, among them the high cost of living, housing that doesn't allow pets, lack of access to transportation, veterinary costs and freezes on intakes.

"These are all very real reasons why people feel the need to abandon their pets or allow them to roam," she says. "That's usually where the cycle of feral cats begins — owned animals reproducing and their offspring growing up outside with no human contact."

According to the City of Saskatoon, an unaltered female cat can produce three litters a year with average litter sizes ranging from four to six kittens. This means that a single, unspayed female cat and her offspring can produce more than 400,000 cats in their lifetimes.

### PLEAS FOR HELP

SOS is a foster-based volunteer organization that provides care and adoption services for stray, abandoned and surrendered cats and kittens.

Last year, the non-profit took in 675 animals, saying intake is at an all-time high.

That's also the case with SCAT Street Cat Rescue, another foster-based volunteer group that provides care and adoption services for cats and kittens.

"On average, we take in 500 to 700 per year," says Nikki Gorgichuk, president

of SCAT. "However, a more accurate statistic would be the number of pleas for help we receive, and that number grows exponentially each year."

Groups like the Saskatoon SPCA and Saskatoon Animal Control Agency, along with other smaller rescue organizations, are also working to care for abandoned, surrendered and stray cats.

"If all of these organizations are providing services for hundreds of cats, it's a real eye-opener," says Fast.

### SPAY AND NEUTER

The organizations emphasize spaying and neutering pets is the best way to reduce overpopulation.

Low-cost options are available. Both the Saskatoon SPCA and the City of Saskatoon offer subsidized spay and neuter programs for low-income pet owners, and SCAT has also introduced a low-cost program.

SOS has launched an initiative called Beat the Heat, Spay-It-Forward. Now in its third year, the goal is to provide low-cost spay and neuter services to residents who own or care for unfixed cats.

Gorgichuk says there are different ways the public can help in its rescue efforts.

"Our greatest need is foster homes," she says. "As a foster-based organization, our intakes are limited to the number our foster homes can handle."

She notes there is a particular need for fostering older rescue cats.

"These are the long haulers that can take months to be adopted and just need a place to decompress and come out of their shells," she says.

SOS is looking to secure a permanent



Several thousand stray, abandoned and surrendered cats and kittens end up at local shelters and rescue agencies every year in Saskatoon. (PHOTO: SOS PRAIRIE RESCUE)

space this year to serve as a home base as it has been relying solely on foster families to temporarily house rescued cats.

"Often, we get cats in double digits and need somewhere for them to stay for a few days while we assess temperaments, triage medical needs and seek foster placements," says Fast.

"Having a warm and safe environment for this to take place would be a game-changer."

Gorgichuk says any contribution is appreciated and can go a long way in helping its rescue efforts.

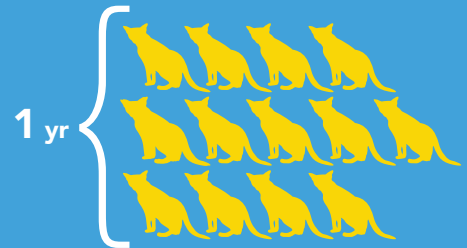
"Sign up to foster, donate, adopt, share our posts and our story," she says. "There are also many low-effort ways to support us, whether it's through our bake sales, drop-and-go donations at SARCAN or using our Co-op number (204933) — every bit adds up."

# It's important to spay or neuter your cat.

- Reduces unwanted litters and cat overpopulation
- Reduces the incidence of disease and infection
- Eliminates female heat cycles and reduces male spraying
- Helps make cats more sociable and affectionate



An unaltered female cat can produce **THREE LITTERS PER YEAR** with average litter sizes ranging from **FOUR TO SIX KITTENS**



A single, unspayed female cat and her offspring can produce **more than 400,000** cats in their lifetimes



[saskatoon.ca/communitycats](http://saskatoon.ca/communitycats)



# Recognize the **FRIGHT** before they **BITE**.

Most dogs bite out of fear.  
Do your part and be dog smart.

Recognize when a dog looks fearful:

- Wide eyes
- Tail tucked
- Ears lowered
- Avoiding eye contact

[saskatoon.ca/biteprevention](http://saskatoon.ca/biteprevention)





# Be a good pet neighbour

Animal lovers and non-pet people can live side-by-side in harmony. It starts with being a considerate neighbour



From May through October, animal control offers patrol parks and off-leash areas on foot, bike or by vehicle, to ensure everyone can enjoy Saskatoon's beautiful green spaces. (PHOTO: SACA)

BY JEANNIE ARMSTRONG

Canada is pet crazy! According to a recent online survey by market research firm GfK, approximately 61 per cent of Canadians own a pet. Cats slightly outnumber dogs, with 35 per cent of Canadians owning cats and 33 per cent owning dogs.

And while the vast majority of Canadians say they consider pets to be an important part of their families, that's not true of everyone.

It's important for pet owners to respect that their neighbours and other members

of the community may not be as fond of animals as they are, says Heather Ens, general manager of the Saskatoon Animal Control Agency (SACA). The agency provides animal control services and enforces the Animal Control Bylaw and Dangerous Animal Bylaw, under contract to the City of Saskatoon.

"As an agency, our mission is to encourage a sense of community and harmony," says Ens. "When we do training with our staff, we remind them that while they all have pets at home and have grown up with animals, there is a good portion

of the community that doesn't have pets or feel comfortable around other people's animals," says Ens.

She says it's important for pet owners to comply with the regulations set forth in the Animal Control Bylaw, established to protect the interests of both humans and animals in our community.

"We have bylaw regulations that say your dog or cat shouldn't run at large. It's not safe for the animals or for humans. One of the reasons that cats should not be allowed to roam is because your cat is potentially a nuisance to your neighbour," says Ens.



**All pets must be on a leash unless  
in a designated off-leash area.**



A cat that is running free is probably using other people's yards as a bathroom, may be hunting birds that bring joy to people in the neighbourhood or disturbing other pets in their own yards.

The Animal Control Bylaw also contains provisions regarding barking dogs. "Barking is probably one of the biggest frustrations voiced by members of our community," says Ens. "We don't expect your dog to be silent 24/7, but we do expect you to be responsible for what's going on with your pet and its impact on the community."

When SACA receives a complaint about a barking dog, a barking questionnaire and bark log completed by the complainant help the officers understand the concerns being raised and the dog's pattern of behaviour. "By the time we receive a complaint, there is a pretty high level of frustration being experienced by the complainant. We come out and have a conversation and ask them to document what's going on," says Ens.

SACA staffers will then go to see the dog's owner and provide educational material to help the owner reduce the nuisance barking. "Sometimes, folks aren't aware that there is a problem. Their dog is very well behaved while they're around, but if the animal is left outside while the owner is away, it spends the entire time barking or howling. They come home and the animal goes back to being a good dog. Documenting that pattern of behaviour sometimes helps deal with the situation, as does keeping the dog indoors when the owner is not home," says Ens.

"Our goal is to decrease the barking and improve on the situation, so both parties can exist peacefully. There's discussion on both sides, not just with the dog owner, but with the complainant."

If the issue continues, the complainant is welcome to file a second complaint. "This can result in a fine (notice of violation)," says Ens.



Good neighbours take responsibility for cleaning up after their animals whether on their own property or when out and about. (PHOTO: CITY OF SASKATOON)

Good neighbours also take responsibility for cleaning up after their animals whether on their own property or when walking through the neighbourhood. "There are regulations in the Bylaw about picking up after your pet. When you pick up your animal's feces, you're looking after everyone in the community. If your animal is going to the bathroom in your yard, you don't want the feces to accumulate, causing your neighbours to file a complaint," says Ens.

There are public parks in Saskatoon where pets are prohibited, even when leashed, including Kinsmen Park, the Saskatoon Forestry Farm Park and the Northeast Swale. "These parks are designated pet-free areas where dogs aren't allowed. We want to find that sense of balance. While you may understand your animal to be friendly, not everybody does. They may have had a bad experience with a dog in the past, or perhaps pet ownership isn't common in their culture. Providing that neutral space is important," says Ens.

Playgrounds, spray parks and enclosed

sports fields are also public spaces where pets are prohibited under the Bylaw. "Children run and scream while they're playing. The degree of excitement can be a bit much for dogs. Just from a safety perspective, it's not a great place for your dog to play, even if it's on-leash," says Ens.

From May through October, the agency's field officers patrol parks and off-leash areas on foot, bike or by vehicle, to ensure everyone can enjoy Saskatoon's beautiful green spaces.

To avoid costly fines, remember the following rules when you and your pet are out exploring. First, ensure your dog or cat has a valid pet license. When strolling through a park, always keep your animal leashed to avoid an at-large fine and keep everyone safe. When out and about, always have a poop bag with you and clean up after your pet. The fine for a first offense is \$100; second offense is \$200; and subsequent offenses are \$300.

It's all part of being a good pet neighbour. To learn more, visit [saskatoonanimalcontrol.ca](http://saskatoonanimalcontrol.ca).



# It's Your Doody





# Do your homework before bringing home a new pet

BY JENNIFER JACOBY-SMITH

In the first few months of 2025, the Saskatoon SPCA saw intake requests for owner-surrendered animals nearly double for both cats and dogs.

The most common reason is an unexpected change in the owners' financial situation.

Another common reason for surrendering a pet is the often-preventable challenge of behavioural issues, especially in dogs.

Preventing problematic behaviors can help reduce pet-surrenders. Some of it begins before you even meet your potential pet.

"Do your research," says Dr. Karen Machin with the University of Saskatchewan's Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVN).

"Whether you are thinking of bringing a small animal, cat or dog into your home, carefully research the specific needs and behaviour of any animal you are considering determining if they are a good fit for your family," says Amber Matthews, director of animal care at the Saskatoon SPCA.

Machin agrees. While each individual dog has a unique personality, some breeds have specific needs or common traits. For instance, if you're looking for a calm, quiet companion, you might want to avoid an energetic breed such as a border collie or a Jack Russell terrier.

Talk to several breeders for advice on selecting the right breed for your family and your lifestyle. If you're thinking of adopting an animal from a shelter, keep in mind the size of dog that suits your environment and lifestyle.

Once you've found the right match, it's time to bring home your new puppy. The very first issue pet parents encounter in puppies

is biting. Puppies explore the world with their mouths. They start teething and want to gnaw on anything within reach — the carpet, furniture, electrical cords or even your fingers.

After puppy-proofing their surroundings, it's important to consistently teach them that teeth on skin is never acceptable. Provide appropriate chew toys where they can safely satisfy their need to chomp on something.

Teaching your dog to avoid certain behaviours can be tricky, but Machin says it's important to start early to teach what is acceptable. It's easy to make excuses when they're young and adorable, but that unwanted behaviour will grow with them.

A puppy jumping on someone might seem endearing when they're small, but that eight-pound puppy might someday be an 80-pound full-grown dog and jumping up on someone is not so endearing then.

"I don't believe in punishment," says Machin. "It's speaking to them in a language they don't understand. If you tell them no, they don't understand what they are supposed to do. Provide them or show them what they should do instead."

In the biting scenario, providing a teething chew toy instead of simply giving the reprimand, "No!" when the puppy bites, will teach the dog that a rubber bone makes a better chew toy.

Machin recommends enrichment toys such as treat- or food-puzzles, snuffle mats or other thinking toys to provide opportunities for the young canine to use their brain. This can lead to a calmer dog, as problem solving can be just as tiring as physical activity.

If your dog is developing problematic behaviours, early intervention is essential. And don't be afraid to call in an expert, says Machin.

First, she suggests visiting your vet.



Enrichment toys such as food puzzles or snuffle mats help engage your pet mentally and physically, helping to reduce problematic behaviours caused by stress or boredom. (GETTY IMAGES)

Sometimes a medical issue can be the cause of difficult behaviours in animals. Your veterinarian can also suggest local resources that can help with your particular situation.

For example, the Saskatoon SPCA is a local resource for all pet parents — not just when you're picking up a new puppy or kitten.

"The Saskatoon SPCA is committed to making training and behaviour support more accessible to Saskatoon and the surrounding community," says Matthews. "Led by certified professional dog trainers and behaviour consultants, we offer a variety of class types including group classes, one-hour workshops and private behaviour consultations and a variety of price points for our services, making it easier for the public to access high quality behavioural support at a price that fits their budget."

You can find more information on their services at [saskatoonSPCA.com](https://saskatoonSPCA.com).

# Beware: Top toxins for cats & dogs

## Protect your pet from these common household poisons

BY JENNY GABRUCH

Knowing common toxins that may harm your pet can mean the difference between life and death.

Many household items can be toxic to dogs and cats, and while some may be obvious, others can be harder to identify.

Dr. Vanessa Cowan, an assistant professor of veterinary toxicology at the University of Saskatchewan's Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVN), says chocolate, grapes and raisins were the most common toxins for dogs being brought to the college's Veterinary Medical Centre in 2024.

Other top toxins include garlic, onions, medications and rodenticides.

All are poisonous to dogs and cats, though more commonly ingested by curious canines.

"Dogs become poisoned way more often than cats, and that's just the nature of dogs — they get into anything and everything," says Cowan.

"In poisoning cases, time is of the essence. It is important to call your veterinarian as soon as you suspect your animal has potentially been poisoned."

### MEDICATIONS

The most common type of medication ingested by pets with dangerous outcomes are nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen (Advil) and naproxen (Aleve).

"Just because these drugs are safe for humans, doesn't mean they're safe for pets," says Cowan. "Although well-intentioned, people give their pets one of these drugs not realizing they could potentially cause harm."

Cats are extremely sensitive to acetaminophen, found in Tylenol.

"They are not able to break it down in their



Accidental ingestion of human drugs is one of the most common causes of poisoning in dogs that are brought to the Western College of Veterinary Medicine's small animal emergency service. (PHOTO: WCVN)

bodies and so they become poisoned very quickly. Just one regular strength tablet of Tylenol can kill a cat."

Prescription medications and marijuana are also on the list of harmful substances.

Pet-proofing your home by keeping medications and other potentially harmful substances secure and out of paw's reach is the best preventative measure.

### XYLITOL

Xylitol is another common item found in the home, a sugar substitute used in such products as toothpaste, pill coatings, chewing gum and baking.

"It is only toxic to dogs and they are very sensitive to it," says Cowan. Keeping items with xylitol out of reach will help protect your pet.

Similarly, rodenticides appeal to dogs as they have an enticing flavor designed to attract rodents. Anticoagulant rodenticides cause internal bleeding.

Cowan says it is critical to identify the type of rodenticide the animal has ingested for the pet to receive appropriate treatment.

The more information people can provide about what the pet ate, how much and when, the better.

### LILY TOXICITY IN CATS

Lily poisonings are by far the most common toxicity cases in cats seen at the college's Veterinary Medical Centre.

Lilies belonging to the genera *Lilium*, also known as "true lilies," and *Herodias* pose the highest mortality risk if ingested. Examples of true lilies include Easter lilies, tiger lilies, Asian lilies, stargazer, daylilies and lily hybrids.

"Cats are the only species known to become poisoned by true lilies," says Cowan. "Any exposure to a true lily can cause poisoning — drinking the water from the vase, ingesting pollen or chewing on the plant."

Cowan recommends bringing the cat in immediately if lily poisoning is suspected. "It causes renal failure, so it is very serious," she says.

If you think your pet has eaten something potentially dangerous, call your veterinarian or a pet poison control center immediately.

## Call for Help

### Emergency poison information for pets:

If you think your pet has eaten something potentially dangerous, call your local veterinarian or a pet poison control center immediately.

### Pet poison control centers

Available throughout North America, incident fees apply.

### Pet Poison Helpline:

1-855-764-7661; [petpoisonhelpline.com](https://petpoisonhelpline.com)

### ASPCA Animal Poison Control

Center: 1-888-426-4435; [aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control](https://aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control)



# Senior pets require extra TLC

Pets age a lot faster than we do.  
A lot can change in even six months.

BY RAY PENNER

It's not something we like to think about, but something we should: That frisky puppy we brought home and adored 10 years ago is now at the other end of life's spectrum.

What is a "senior" pet? For large dogs, it's after they're seven years old. For smaller breeds — and for cats — it's eight or nine. As your pet approaches this age, there are several steps you can take to help ensure their best possible health, says Dr. Christina Meschkat, a certified canine rehabilitation veterinarian who is also a general practitioner at Bridge City Veterinary Rehabilitation in Saskatoon.

**Cognitive function begins to decline in older pets and they can get conditions similar to dementia. Fortunately, you can teach your old dog new tricks.**

Mobility is essential, especially daily low-impact activities to maintain healthy bones and muscles. "Leash-walks for dogs is so important. We all know we love throwing a ball for dogs, but ball-throwing can be quite damaging to their joints."

Avoid what Meschkat calls "weekend warrior stuff" where you head out on Saturday for several hours of rigorous activity at the dog park to make up for an inactive week, and the next day your dog is stiff and sore.

Keeping your pet at a lean body weight is also a priority. "We love to feed our pets, but we can overdo it," cautions Dr. Meschkat. "Many people mistakenly think that a chubby dog is a healthy dog. Obesity is rampant. It's estimated that 50 to 60 per cent of all dogs

and cats are overweight."

Cognitive function begins to decline in older pets and they can get conditions similar to dementia. Fortunately, you can teach your old dog new tricks. All dogs love to learn. In fact, adult dogs often learn better than puppies, because they're less easily distracted. "Brain games are super-important, especially during times when the weather makes it hard to walk your dog outdoors," says Meschkat.

A wide range of products can stimulate your pet's brain. Food puzzles and "snuffle toys" require the dog to figure out (or sniff out) what to move or flip over to get a treat, much like natural foraging in the wild.

It is also important to discuss with your veterinarian what your pet's inherent predisposition to ailments might be. Large breeds are more likely to develop hip dysplasia and rupture of the CCL (cranial cruciate ligament), which both cause lameness in hind legs. Rottweilers and Labrador retrievers are particularly prone to CCL. Cats can also get it. Small dogs are more likely to experience heart problems. French bulldogs can be afflicted with upper airway and skin problems. Cataracts and diabetes show up in both cats and dogs.

As for mixed breeds, the common belief in "hybrid vigour" doesn't always hold true. Meschkat points to labradoodles as an example. "Poodles are really prone to Addison's disease. When you crossbreed a poodle, it doesn't reduce the risk. With the "doodle explosion" in the last five years, I've seen a lot more of Addison's disease than I used to."

Fortunately, there are a number of effective treatments for many of these



A daily leashed walk will help maintain your senior pet's mobility. (GETTY IMAGES)

ailments. Even something as inexpensive as fish oil can greatly reduce arthritic pain in your dog or cat.

Cats, it should be noted, tend to hide their arthritis, along with other afflictions. Your cat might not be limping in front of you, but suddenly it isn't jumping on the counter anymore. "It might not mean that finally they learned not to do that," says Meschkat.

All pets, dogs and cats alike, benefit from proper dental hygiene. Have safe objects for your pet to chew on at home. Schedule regular cleaning to avoid potential problems such as with the heart, kidneys and liver.

Finally, just as with us humans in our senior years, it's important to have a good relationship with your health-care provider. An annual veterinary checkup for your dog or cat is fine when they are in the prime of life, but twice a year is best in their senior years.

# The power of connection

## The comforting effect animals provide can help decrease experiences of pain, anxiety and stress

BY MEGHANNE UPTIGROVE

Those of us fortunate enough to share our lives with an animal companion are aware of the positive influence they have on our day to day — but we don't necessarily understand the science behind it.

Led by Dr. Colleen Dell, the PAWsitive Connections Lab was founded in 2016 within the Office of One Health and Wellness at the University of Saskatchewan (USask) to explore the interactions between animals and people across a range of disciplines.

"If you ask a person if their dog is important to their life, they'll say, 'Of course, they're my best friend, they know the most about me' — and, in some cases — 'They even saved my life,'" says Dell. "But people don't understand why, so that's what we're trying to bring to the table with our evidence."

Dell has always loved animals, but it was her experience with her dog Roxie, who she adopted from the Ottawa SPCA while she was working on her PhD in the mid-90s, that truly showed her the importance of animal relationships in our lives.

"She was this wild boxer dog," says Dell. "And we became so connected and bonded. She was incredibly important to me — the laughs she brought into my life, the people I met because of her, all of those things."

As a professor at USask and senior research associate at the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, Dell has an extensive background in addictions studies, Indigenous health and the criminal justice system, three things she says come together in the Lab.

"Initially it was very much about working in the Indigenous health field, where there is such a different understanding of health and well-being," she says. "It's about being connected to animals, to the land and to



At the Pawsitive Connections Lab, Dr. Linzi Williamson (left), Dr. Colleen Dell (centre) and Dr. Darlene Chalmers explore the power of the connection between animals and humans for individuals recovering from addiction and mental health struggles. (PHOTO: USASK)

people — and without one being healthy, none of the others can be either."

The Lab is now under the joint direction of Dell, Dr. Darlene Chalmers with the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Regina and Dr. Linzi Williamson with the Department of Psychology and Health Studies at USask. In collaboration with employees, students, graduates and community members, the Lab's main focus is to explore and understand the potential power of the connection between animals and humans for individuals recovering from addiction and mental health struggles.

In addition to contributing significantly to this growing field of research, all the work done at the Lab is built on a strong foundation of animal welfare.

"The animal's voice and experience is always included," says Dell. "We're not just doing research on the dogs — we're doing research with them. We know there is so much here to understand that we still don't, and we have the capacity as researchers to gain a better understanding of animals in our lives and us in theirs."

Through their ongoing research, Drs. Dell, Chalmers and Williamson have identified several key benefits that come from the human-animal bond.

Animals can facilitate a number of social connections — whether it's through meeting people at the dog park or pausing on walks to greet passersby, something Dell initially recognized during her time with Roxie.

The calming and comforting effect animals provide can also help decrease experiences of pain, anxiety and stress, as highlighted in the PAWS Your Stress Therapy Dog Program at the USask campus.

Animals can also provide a motivational factor for positive change.

"When we have someone who really believes in us, that can be incredibly important and a big motivator for change," says Dell, who has witnessed the transformative effects of animal companionship in the PAWsitive Support Canine Assisted Learning Program at Drumheller Institution. The program aims to offer canine-human connection to program participants with a substance use disorder.

Dell recalls Annabelle, one of the program's therapy dogs, having a major impact on the life of an inmate there.

"He and Annabelle had an incredible relationship," she says. "Someone believed in him, someone loved him and he felt it. It's almost magical when you see some of these things happen. These are true, beautiful stories of how people change."

As the Lab continues its work in 2025, Dell looks forward to continuing her community-based research and raising public awareness of how these important findings can benefit society.

"Understanding the animals we share our lives with will benefit both the animals and their welfare, as well as our own mental, physical and spiritual well-being."



# Health Alert: Veterinarians warn of the dangers of parvovirus

It's deadly. It's everywhere. It's preventable.

BY RAY PENNER

Canine parvovirus — “parvo” — is a virus spread by members of the canid (dog) family through direct contact or on the ground through their feces. Signs of infection include severe, bloody diarrhea, vomiting, lethargy and loss of appetite.

**“Dogs do what dogs do. They chew on sticks. They eat grass and dig in the dirt. The virus loves cells that are rapidly dividing — those are the cells of the gut and bone marrow.”**

— Dr. Cathy Dick

If you own a dog, you can be certain that your pet will be exposed to it. Even if you live on a farm where there have never been dogs, your new puppy is very likely to be exposed through the feces of coyotes, as coyotes can spread the virus. Furthermore, the virus can be present in the environment for years, withstanding the coldest of winters and reactivating in warmer weather.

“In the spring, our parvo ward is filled all the time,” says Dr. Cathy Dick, veterinarian at the University of Saskatchewan’s Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVN). “It’s out there. It’s not a rare disease. In fact, if we have a puppy that we know isn’t vaccinated, and it comes in with diarrhea, the first thing we always do is check for parvo.



To prevent the spread of canine parvovirus in young puppies, veterinarians recommend a “full puppy” series of vaccines that are given between eight weeks and 16 weeks of age. (PHOTO: CHRISTINA WEESE)

“Dogs do what dogs do,” Dr. Dick continues. “They chew on sticks. They eat grass and dig in the dirt. The virus loves cells that are rapidly dividing — those are the cells of the gut and bone marrow.” That’s why puppies, where so many cells are rapidly growing, are especially at risk — and why owners need to get them properly vaccinated, starting at eight weeks.

“It is totally preventable with vaccines,” emphasizes Dick, but she notes that people can have a lot of misconceptions about vaccines. “They think that if their puppy received one vaccination at eight weeks of age or after, that they are protected and they are not. They need a full puppy series of vaccines.”

The recommended series of three



inoculations starts at eight weeks of age, with boosters at 12 weeks and 16 weeks.

“The puppy is not considered protected from parvo until two weeks after the last booster given at 16 weeks of age. It is really important that the puppy is at least 16 weeks of age at the time of the last vaccine,” says Dick.

Boosters are required during the puppy series for a couple of reasons. Before 16 weeks of age, a puppy will have some resistance to parvo obtained from its mother through antibodies ingested while nursing. “However, maternal antibodies, while protective, can interfere with the effectiveness of the vaccine (less of the vaccine is available to the puppy’s immune system). The numbers of maternal antibodies wane over time but we don’t know how quickly as it will vary for each individual puppy. By 16 weeks of age, the puppy loses its initial resistance but its immune system can then fully respond to the vaccine.”

Dr. Dick cites another reason for the series. “We want them to produce memory cells, so that when their immune system is exposed to parvo — which it will be — the immune system goes ‘I know what you are’ and can mount a response quite quickly. If the puppy has no protection, it can take up to two weeks to mount an immune response, during which time the puppy could die.”

One year after that first series, Dr. Dick recommends the dog has a three-year booster vaccine.

If it sounds as though these vaccines could be expensive, compare that investment to the emotional and financial strain of a critically ill pet. Treating a dog that has contracted parvo could result



Until dogs are fully vaccinated, owners should avoid taking their pets to dog parks and other high-traffic environments where they may become infected. (PHOTO: BRANDON WHITE)

**Owners might think a wise thing would be to keep their puppy away from other dogs during its first few months, but that would be a mistake. Puppies need to be socialized before 16 weeks.**

in veterinary bills totalling thousands of dollars, with an unsuccessful outcome.

Early prevention includes doing your research even before you bring a puppy home. Ask the breeder about any history of parvovirus and what precautions have been taken. A very good question is, “Who is your veterinarian?” If they can’t tell you, it says a lot.

Owners might think a wise thing would be to keep their puppy away from other dogs during its first few months, but that would be a mistake. Puppies need to be socialized before 16 weeks. Dr. Dick cautions: “A dog park is not a good place to socialize a little unvaccinated puppy. Instead, if you have family or friends that have healthy, vaccinated dogs that like puppies, go to their place or have them come to yours.” Puppy classes can also provide opportunities for socialization.

Clearly, vaccination is the answer, for both cats and dogs. Kittens also require a series of vaccines (to prevent viral respiratory infections and parvovirus) to keep them healthy. Your veterinarian can advise you on preventable diseases such as rabies, and the best course of action. Your pet will thank you for it!



**Pets can't ADD  
but they do MULTIPLY**

**Fix your critter to prevent an unwanted litter.**





# Animal Control

The Saskatoon Animal Control Agency (SACA) is responsible for the enforcement of the Animal Control Bylaw and the Dangerous Animal Bylaw and is contracted by the City of Saskatoon to provide animal control services including:

- Reporting of animals at large
- Reporting barking and howling
- Reporting dog bites
- Complaints regarding defecation
- Reporting of dangerous animals

**SACA Hotline: 306-385-7387 (available 24/7)**



## Responsible Pet Ownership

Make sure your pet is a positive addition to the community.

- Keep them licensed – All dogs and cats (indoor and outdoor) over four months require a valid license
- Keep them from roaming – All pets must be on-leash (no longer than 2m in length) when off private property
- Scoop the Poop – Owners must clean up after their pets

Be considerate and courteous to other people and children enjoying the outdoors and keep in mind that not everyone is comfortable around pets, even friendly ones.

