

BENEFITS OF EARLY DESEXING

RSPCA KNOWLEDGEBASE

Traditionally, vets have recommended that cats and dogs are desexed between about 5-1/2 and 6 months of age. But over the past decade, desexing at an earlier age (from eight weeks onwards) has become more common. This is known as early-age desexing or EAD. The RSPCA has been desexing kittens and puppies in its shelters at this earlier age for many years, and based on this experience and the cumulation of considerable scientific evidence, the RSPCA considers EAD to be a safe and effective strategy for the wider community to prevent unplanned/unwanted litters in cats and dogs.

Preventing unwanted litters of cats and dogs is a key objective for the RSPCA. Desexing is vital to reduce the number of unwanted companion animals entering shelters and pounds, and the earlier that cats and dogs can be desexed, the less likely it is that they will reproduce. This is particularly relevant for cats, who can become pregnant as early as 4 months of age, well before the traditional desexing age of about 5.5 to 6 months of age. Desexing at an early age also reduces the amount of time young animals need to spend in the shelter environment. The RSPCA also advocates desexing of puppies and kittens prior to sale from breeders or pet shops, and EAD makes this possible.

In addition to helping to prevent unwanted pregnancy, EAD can offer significant animal welfare benefits when compared to traditional age desexing. Desexing surgery is faster and easier when carried out on younger patients as their anatomical structures are less developed. There is less tissue trauma and less tissue handling involved, the surgery incision site is smaller, and bleeding is reduced and minimal. It also takes less time to prepare the animals for EAD surgery which means less time under general anaesthesia. The anaesthetic recovery and wound healing times are also shorter, providing further animal welfare benefits. EAD significantly reduces the risk of mammary cancer in both dogs and cats. These benefits are in addition to all of the commonly accepted benefits associated with general desexing, such as a reduction in wandering/roaming and undesirable sexual behaviors such as mounting and urine spraying.