

The Pandemic Puppies team have published their findings on the motivations and behaviour of owners purchasing puppies

From 10 November-31 December 2020 the RVC ran a survey to ask you about your experience of buying a puppy during 2019 or 2020 to understand if any changes occurred in puppy purchasing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The study received **7545** responses, so firstly a huge thank you to every one of you who took part in, shared and supported the survey.
- Following generous funding from Battersea, we are currently planning a series of further surveys to follow the lives of our Pandemic Puppies over a longer period, and we would love your help once again. This is your chance to tell us how things have gone for you and your dog since the first survey.
- We will contact all owners who offered to take part in further research before sending the next survey and you will have the opportunity to opt out if you have changed your mind.
- If you initially said you didn't want to take part in further research but have changed your mind, just drop us an email on pandemicpuppies@rvc.ac.uk with your email address, along with your dog's date of birth and breed and we will contact you as soon as the new survey is ready.
- If you would like to know more about what we are doing with the information we collected from the first survey, read on.



If not, we are very grateful for your help. We really couldn't do any of this research to help both yourselves and future puppy owners without your hard work and dedication in sharing and completing our survey. Thank you!

pandemicpuppies@rvc.ac.uk

<https://www.rvc.ac.uk/vetcompass/research-projects-and-opportunities/projects/rvc-pandemic-puppies-survey>

What are the key findings from the Pandemic Puppies survey so far?



- Over 1 in 10 Pandemic Puppy owners had not considered buying a dog before the pandemic
- 2 in 5 Pandemic Puppy owners felt that the pandemic had influenced their decision to buy their puppy, most commonly because they had more time to care for a dog
- Pandemic Puppy owners were more likely to be first time dog owners, to have children in their household and pay a deposit before seeing their puppy compared to 2019 puppy purchasers
- Pandemic Puppy owners were less likely to look for a breeder who performed health tests on their breeding dogs and less likely to view their puppy in person compared to 2019 puppy purchasers
- Pandemic Puppies were more likely to be younger at purchase, to have been delivered or collected from outside the breeder's property, be seen without their littermates and to cost over £2000 when compared to 2019 puppies
- The full paper detailing the findings can be freely accessed here: <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/11/9/2500>

I'm worried about where my puppy was bred – what should I do?

- Pandemic restrictions meant that many ideal puppy buying recommendations could not be followed in a COVID-19 safe manner, for example visiting puppies inside the breeders' home in person during periods of lockdown. This may have led to many well-meaning owners unintentionally purchasing puppies from poor welfare sources that were able to hide the true environment the puppies they were selling were raised in. 'Red flags' for poor welfare breeders and dealers include:
 - Puppies being sold under 8 weeks of age
 - 'Breeders' refusing to allow you to see the puppy in their home environment. Instead, they may have offered videos or photos of the puppy before you collect it, and only allowed collection away from their home or even delivered the puppy to you
 - Puppies being viewed and/or sold without their mother or littermates
 - Puppies being sold with a passport, which may mean they were imported

Puppies born in poor welfare environments may be at risk of future health and behaviour problems. If you are worried this may apply to you and your dog, please do not panic, as help is available:

- Owners who have any concerns about their dog's health or behaviour should contact their vet in the first instance who can examine your dog, take a thorough history and suggest further investigations or treatments that may be necessary
- If you have more serious concerns about your dog's behaviour, we suggest discussing with your vet about a referral to an ABTC accredited animal or veterinary behaviourist (<https://abtc.org.uk/practitioners/>)

How should I safely buy a puppy in the future?

- Follow the guidelines set out in the 'Petfished' campaign (<https://getyourpetsafely.campaign.gov.uk>):
 - Check that the **person selling the puppy has truly bred the puppy themselves**. It is illegal under Lucy's Law for anyone other than the breeder to sell a puppy (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/lucys-law-spells-the-beginning-of-the-end-for-puppy-farming>)
 - Only agree to **meet at the breeder's home** and make sure you see the puppy interacting with its **mother and littermates**
 - Do not pay a deposit **without seeing the puppy in person first**
 - Check the puppy is **over 8 weeks of age** before you bring them home
 - Be especially **wary if the puppy has a 'passport'** as this puppy was likely imported from abroad into the UK
 - Ask about microchipping, vaccinations, worming, flea treatments
 - Ask about **health testing of the puppy's parents**, for example the BVA hip, elbow and eye schemes (<https://www.bva.co.uk/canine-health-schemes/>) along with DNA tests which are recommended for many pedigree and crossbreed dogs. Ask to see proof of test result.
 - Use The Puppy Contract (<https://puppycontract.org.uk>)



How can I help my dog adjust to life following the initial phase of the pandemic?

As restrictions continue to ease in the UK, there are a number of steps owners of both Pandemic Puppies and older dogs can take to help support their dogs with the changes to their routine

- A useful resource is available from our colleagues at the Dogs Trust (<https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/post-lockdown/>) and covers topics such as choosing a dogwalker, doggy day care, introducing your dog to other dogs, visitors to the home and preventing/dealing with separation anxiety
- This resource from our colleagues at the British Veterinary Association details what behavioural changes to look out for (<https://www.bva.co.uk/media/3419/advice-for-all-clients-regarding-behavioural-changes-in-their-pets-for-bva-use.pdf>) .

What's next?



- We are preparing to launch the next exciting phase of our Pandemic Puppies study funded by **Battersea Dogs and Cats Home!**
- This will allow you to contribute to some further short surveys, with a maximum of one every three months over the next year.
- By being a part of this groundbreaking research, you will contribute to a deeper understanding about the challenges that you as owners are facing. Owners, the veterinary profession and other dog welfare organisations can use this information to provide the very best lifetime care and support for dogs who were bought during the pandemic.
- We are now also working on a second publication which will focus on the early life experiences, health and behaviour of Pandemic Puppies bought in 2020. We hope to publish the results of this soon and will of course update you when that happens on the project website:

<https://www.rvc.ac.uk/vetcompass/research-projects-and-opportunities/projects/rvc-pandemic-puppies-survey>

In the meantime, thank you once again for your support of this important project. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact the team on our email address: pandemicpuppies@rvc.ac.uk

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