

A BITCH'S FIRST SEASON

A practical guide for owners — what to expect and how to keep your young dog safe

IMPORTANT

A first season (heat) is a normal part of sexual maturity. The timing varies between dogs and breeds. A bitch can become pregnant during her first season, so take precautions from the very first signs.

1. When will her first season happen?

There is no single correct age. Many bitches have their first season somewhere around 6–15 months, but some mature earlier or later, and larger breeds may take longer. If you are concerned that your dog has not had a season when expected, discuss it with your vet.

2. Early signs to look for

- Swollen vulva
- Increased licking of the vulva
- Small spots or drops of blood/discharge
- More frequent urination or marking
- Changes in mood, attention or behaviour
- Increased interest from male dogs
- She may become more affectionate, restless or distracted

Some dogs show very subtle signs, and the amount of bleeding varies considerably.

3. How long does a season last?

A season commonly lasts around 2–4 weeks, although there is considerable individual variation. The discharge may change in colour and amount during the season. Do not assume she is no longer fertile simply because the bleeding has reduced or stopped.

4. Preventing an accidental mating

Be extra careful throughout the entire season. Keep her on a lead outside and avoid areas where off-lead male dogs may approach. Do not leave her unattended in a garden, even if it is securely fenced. At home, keep her completely separated from entire male dogs — doors, crates and physical barriers should be used where necessary. Never rely on dog pants, nappies or supervision alone to prevent mating.

5. Exercise during her season

Normal exercise is usually fine if she is comfortable, but choose controlled walks and quieter areas. Avoid dog parks, group activities and situations where entire males may be present. Follow her energy levels and behaviour rather than forcing exercise.

6. Hygiene & comfort

Dog sanitary pants can help protect furniture and bedding, but they must be changed regularly and kept clean and dry. They are not contraception. Provide fresh bedding, normal access to water and a calm routine. Increased licking is common, but excessive licking, soreness or a strong unpleasant smell should be checked by a vet.

7. Behaviour changes are normal

Hormonal changes can make some bitches more clingy, restless, sensitive or irritable. Others show almost no behavioural change. Give her space when needed, keep routines predictable and continue gentle training. Avoid punishment for season-related behaviours.

8. Can she get pregnant on her first season?

Yes. A bitch can become pregnant during her first season. Fertility does not depend on having had a previous season or litter. If an accidental mating occurs, contact your veterinary practice as soon as possible for advice. Do not attempt to separate dogs that are tied together — forcing them apart can cause injury.

9. When should you contact your vet?

Seek veterinary advice if she seems unwell, is very lethargic, has a fever, is vomiting, is drinking or urinating excessively, appears painful, has a very heavy bleed, develops a foul-smelling discharge, or you notice anything that seems abnormal for her. **Pyometra (a potentially life-threatening uterine infection) can occur after a season**, so illness in the weeks following a season should never be ignored.

KEEP HER SAFE • KEEP HER SEPARATED • STAY CALM

A first season can seem daunting, but with good management it is usually straightforward. Keep a note of the start and end dates — this can be useful for future seasons and veterinary discussions.