

UNDERSTANDING VACCINES

What is a vaccine?

A vaccine is a prepared agent of a disease or a synthetic substitute used to stimulate the production of antibodies and provide immunity against that disease, bacteria, virus or organism.

Your dog's immune system, when vaccinated, is able to respond quicker and more efficiently should they come in contact with a causative agent.

There is no guarantee that a vaccine will fully protect your pet from viruses or diseases but they can be a safe and effective prevention method and may lessen the symptoms, should your dog become infected.

Are vaccines safe?

According to the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA), vaccines should only be administered to healthy animals. Any dog that has an illness, compromised immune system or is on certain medications should not be receiving a vaccine until they have been deemed healthy enough by your veterinarian.

Vaccines are generally considered safe and can provide protection against some diseases that are potentially deadly, however vaccine reactions do occur. Vaccinating unnecessarily or with too many vaccines at one time can potentially overwhelm a dog's immune system and cause adverse reactions.

Should I be vaccinating my dog yearly?

According to the OVMA, vaccinating yearly is currently under investigation within

veterinary medicine as the length of immunity for each individual vaccine is unknown. Immunity to a virus can last months or the entire life of the dog. It is something that is still being studied and will vary from one dog to another.

Vaccine manufacturers have come "under fire" recently to produce concrete data that annual vaccines are essential. Until adequate information is obtained regarding the necessity of annual vaccines, veterinarians are ethically and legally bound to follow the recommended administration of the vaccines.

Consider the information provided below and your dog's lifestyle, then talk to your veterinarian about what risk factors your dog faces and what vaccines may be appropriate.

Are all vaccines mandatory?

No. Only the rabies vaccine is required by law. There are 2 types of rabies vaccine; the one year (vaccinate yearly) and the 3 year (vaccinate every 3 years). Be sure to know which one your pet is getting to avoid vaccinating unnecessarily.

What are "core" vaccines?

Core vaccines are considered by veterinarians to be necessary for all dogs due to the serious health threat they pose to both dogs and humans. Core vaccines include rabies, distemper, parvovirus, parainfluenza and adenovirus. It is important that all dogs be vaccinated with the core vaccines once in their life, usually when they are puppies.



What is the DHPP vaccine?

This is a combination vaccine that includes distemper, parvovirus, adenovirus and parainfluenza.

Distemper is a viral disease that can affect several organs or systems within the dog's body. It is a virus similar to measles that is passed from dog to dog. It is considered a "core" vaccine due to its potential to be fatal.

Parvo virus is a viral infection that affects primarily young dogs (6 weeks to 6 months) but can impact a dog at any time. The dog becomes infected when in contact with infected dogs or stool. The virus is contagious and attacks rapidly dividing cells so the intestinal tract is often disrupted. It is prevalent in some large breed dogs, including Labradors. It, too, is considered a "core" vaccine as it can be life threatening.

Adeno virus is also known as canine hepatitis affecting multiple systems, including the liver. It is passed from dog to dog and is considered a "core" vaccine.

Parainfluenza is the viral form of kennel cough. Please see below for more information on this vaccine.

Should I vaccinate my dog for "kennel cough"?

Kennel cough is an infectious inflammation of the airway that is spread from one dog to another via secretions from the respiratory tract (coughing). Dogs that are at the highest risk for kennel cough are ones that congregate in boarding facilities, at groomers, in dog shows and dog parks.

There are over 10 different organisms that can cause kennel cough. Bordetella (bacterial) and parainfluenza (viral) are the 2 most common and the ones with vaccines.

Consider the following if you are contemplating vaccinating your dog for kennel cough:

- Vaccinated dogs can still develop kennel cough if exposed to the other infectious agents.
- Vaccination may not prevent against infection but will help reduce severity.
- Parainfluenza is almost always a part of DHPP vaccine. Vaccinating separately for it does not give the dog any added protection.
- Kennel cough can be treated using a cough suppressant and antibiotic (for bacterial infection) with a complete recovery anticipated in 10-14 days.
- Kennel cough is often considered a "self-limiting disease" therefore some pets will not require treatment should they become infected.

Should I worry about my dog contracting lyme disease?

Lyme disease is a bacterium transmitted through the bite of an infested tick. The tick must be attached for more than 24 hrs for the virus to be transmitted. Treatment is a course of 4 weeks of antibiotics along with other medications to control other clinical signs and symptoms (joint pain can be primary). Generally, ticks can be found in wooded areas, dense bush or tall grasses.

Consider the lifestyle of your pet (where you walk, run and play) and refer to the link below to see if your community is at risk before you vaccinate.

Publichealthontario.ca/en/eRepository/lyme_disease_risk_areas_map

My vet wants me to vaccinate for Leptospirosis. What is it?

Leptospirosis is a bacterial infection that affects the liver and kidneys. Transmission occurs when your dog comes in contact with infected urine, usually from raccoons and skunks. The leptospirosis bacteria survives well in wet conditions, but not freezing, therefore it is most common in fall and spring.

Allowing your dog to drink from stagnant water where wildlife is abundant puts them at a greater risk.

There are many different types of leptospirosis bacterium and each are unique, requiring different vaccines. Some pose little risk to your dog. Current vaccines have approximately 4 of the most common types of the bacteria and therefore do not protect your dog from all causative factors.

Treatment for leptospirosis, should your pet become infected, is a course of antibiotics. Most uncomplicated cases recover within 2 weeks.

Understanding risk factors, having a solid understanding of your dog's current state of health and having an open and honest dialogue with your veterinarian is paramount when considering vaccines. Your pet relies on you to be their health advocate.

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