

The Truth About Vaccinations

Vaccinations are *vital* to the good health of your companion animal. However, yearly re-vaccinations are not required and, in fact, are strongly discouraged. One prevailing veterinary medical journal recommends vaccinating every three years, along with the 3-year rabies vaccine (in order to obtain a 3-year rabies vaccine, you must get your pet vaccinated on or before the 'expiration' date on their last rabies certificate). Having your pet's vaccinations done every 3 years, instead of yearly, will also reduce the risk of Vaccination Site Sarcomas (a cancer occurring at the place on your pet where a vaccination was given). There is also published support for not re-vaccinating your animal, after his or her initial vaccines, for the rest of its life. In *Current Veterinary Therapy XI* (page 205), it states that "almost without exception there is no immunologic requirement for annual re-vaccination. Immunity to viruses persists for years or for the life of the animal."

For those of you who seek a middle ground between not re-vaccinating at all and exposing your animal to the potentially harmful reactions of over-vaccination, even every three years, there is a third option.

After the initial round of vaccinations (with the exception of rabies) a procedure called "titering" can be done. A blood titer is a test performed on a sample of blood to determine the antibodies your animal carries against diseases. The cost of titering is about the same cost as vaccination, and can allow you to maintain good health and protection without adding unneeded chemicals in your animal's system.

It is suspected by many alternative veterinary medical practitioners that the over-vaccination of companion animals has led to the catastrophic increase of cancer and other diseases in the last 20 years that were rare long ago. The list of important vaccinations to dogs and cats follows.

RABIES A rabies vaccination is required by law and can, in fact, protect both you and your animal from unwanted legal action should your cat or dog bite or scratch someone who fears that the animal is rabid.

The rabies certificate will preclude that concern; in some cases saving the life of the animal should an authority require the animal be tested (since testing can only be done by analyzing brain tissue from a decapitated animal). The rabies vaccine is very close to 100% effective. After the initial injection, mark your calendar at 9 to 12 months from that date and re-vaccinate within that window. This provides a 3-year immunity, rather than an annual booster requirement. Be forewarned, however, if you miss the twelve-month mark by even a day, you will be required by law to re-vaccinate again the following year.

DISTEMPER COMPLEX The canine (DHLPP) and feline (FVRC+E) distemper complex vaccines are vital to ward off a variety of serious diseases. These should be administered early in an animal's life - but after maternal immunity has worn off (at least two are recommended 14-21 days apart) - with follow up booster(s) per your veterinarian's recommendation. These are nearly 100% effective, and again can last a lifetime, hence the logic of titering (mentioned above).

FelV/FIV In addition to these vaccines for felines, there is the FelV (Feline Leukemia) vaccine. This one is not nearly as effective as rabies and distemper complex, with typically between a 45-85% success rate of warding off the disease with repeated exposure. However, since FelV is transmitted saliva-to-saliva, it is a sensible vaccine to consider for multi-cat households or cats that are allowed outdoors. There is vaccine against FIV (Feline AIDS), however, be aware that if you do choose to vaccinate your cat with this vaccine, your cat will then test positive for FIV for life. Your cat will not, in fact, be positive for FIV, but it will test positive for FIV. Should he or she ever get lost and be lucky enough to find itself in a no-kill shelter, it will then get tested by shelter veterinary personnel, who will then consider the cat an FIV positive cat.

ADDITIONAL CANINE VACCINES The additional list for canines is a bit longer, due mainly to the assumption that dogs spend more time outdoors than cats. This vaccine list includes bordatella (kennel cough), lyme, corona and heartworm medication. Again, after the initial inoculation, titering could be the way to go. Consult your veterinarian for the best sequencing and ages to administer all vaccines.

ONE FINAL NOTE ABOUT VACCINES Since the purpose of each vaccine is to invoke an immune response to develop antibodies, your animal will feel quite lethargic, tired, achy, maybe even ill while his or her body launches the good fight. If one vaccine brings on such symptoms, many vaccines administered at a time will only compound the symptoms.

If your veterinarian suggests your pet receives the whole list of vaccines at once, resist this suggestion! It is an awful lot to ask of a kitten or puppy's immune system to take on all at once, not to mention if they are also in for an overnight visit to be spayed or neutered at the same time!

For more information about vaccines, consult *The Nature of Animal Healing*, Chapter 4: The Dubious Legacy of Vaccines, by Martin Goldstein, DVM.