

## Pet Vaccinations – A Time for Change

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The great news is that annual boosters are no longer considered necessary every year for pets by a growing number of veterinarians, veterinary researchers and over half of the veterinary colleges. The good news is that your pet can be protected for life by a small number of vaccines in its first year of life. The bad news is that many pet owners are not aware of this information.

My object with this article is not to discuss whether vaccinations are effective in preventing disease. I believe they do work to prevent acute diseases most of the time. I also believe they are capable of “grafting” on to the vaccinated individual a debilitating range of chronic problems while causing life-threatening reactions in others. Just as we cannot expect every human being to have the same degree of intelligence, so too can we not expect every individual pet to react smoothly to vaccinations. So, yes indeed, you do put your pet’s health at risk each time it is given an unnecessary vaccination.

Although a direct causal relationship is yet to be discovered scientifically, there are now studies by veterinarians, such as Dr. Larry Glickman at the University of Purdue, that indicate an increase in auto-immunity following vaccination.

Dr. Mike Lappin of Colorado State University has shown that the antigens from Crandall Feline Kidney Cell Culture (which are used to produce feline viral vaccines) produce antibodies in cats that attack cat kidney cells. In his study, distemper vaccines given to kittens in a typical pediatric schedule produced these same antibodies and these anti-kidney antibodies persisted for at least six months. Whether these antibodies are involved in the development of chronic progressive renal failure in cats has yet to be determined, but it certainly raises a red flag.

The incidence of fibrosarcomas in cats (a life-threatening cancer definitively linked to vaccinations) is now as high as 1 in 400 cats in some parts of the U.S., possibly higher.

Thus, it is the safety of vaccines that is at issue. No long-term safety studies of more than a couple weeks have ever been done, not just for pet vaccinations, but for human vaccinations as well. Yet, vaccinations have been embraced by the medical community as both safe and effective. Statements implying that vaccines are safe in the long term are without basis.

When puppies and kittens are first born, the milk they consume from mom is loaded with antibodies in most cases that will protect them for the first 6-12 weeks of life. Vaccinations administered during this period will not result in antibody production in the majority of these young animals because the antibodies they received from the milk will “neutralize” the vaccine virus before it can create a response from the youngster’s system.

Therefore, it makes little to no sense to be giving vaccines before 8 weeks and my opinion is that they should be delayed to 12 weeks. Prior to 12 weeks, there is minimal benefit, but the immature immune system is placed at risk for bad reactions. I advise my clients with puppies to still socialize them, but to use common sense regarding their out-of-home activities before 12 weeks. This strategy has proven perfectly fine for over 3 years now.

After 12 weeks, giving puppies and kittens vaccinations will result in their own active immunity (antibodies they produce) over 90% of the time. It would be very rare for any animal to require a second booster for any one virus. I also recommend that the vaccines be separated out so they receive only one virus antigen at a time (eg. Parvo first followed

by Distemper at 16 weeks), thereby minimizing risk of reactions. In this region, Distemper and Parvo are the only diseases I vaccinate for in dogs, other than Rabies for those requesting it.

In the case of kittens, if they will always be indoor cats, I do not administer any vaccinations. If they will go outside, I wait until 2-4 weeks before their first venture outside (usually after 4 months) and then administer one Distemper vaccine only. Studies from the early 1980's demonstrated that it was virtually impossible to infect cats over one year old, under experimental conditions, with the feline leukemia virus, even by injection.

For all of these animals, the choice is the owner's as to which vaccines they want their pet to have or whether to vaccinate at all. I simply provide the information for them to make an educated decision. I have seen too many vaccine reactions to do anything less.

Blood tests can be done any time from a month following vaccines to measure circulating antibodies and will confirm that your pet's immune system is primed to take on exposure to these viruses. Any level of antibody indicates that memory cells of the immune system are active and boosting is unnecessary. These tests are by no means suggested every year, but can be a helpful tool to guide re-vaccination decisions.

The likely outcome of giving a booster is that, once again, antibodies already "on board" will simply neutralize the vaccine virus and no benefit is gained whilst again risking harmful reactions.

A lot of pet owners are under the misconception that, because their pet goes outside, to the park, etc, where they might be "exposed" to diseases, their immune systems require a regular "reminder" in the form of a vaccine. This defies logic. On the contrary, regular "exposure" helps the immune system stay primed, making the annual vaccine even less needed.

Although I have stated this in previous articles, I cannot emphasize enough that any pet receiving a vaccination should be 100% healthy. This excludes vaccinating pets with any health problems whatsoever, including diseases in "remission" such as skin diseases, cancer, thyroid problems, to name a few, and especially not those with a history of autoimmune disease. Please understand that you are not benefiting your pet at all by vaccinating while unhealthy.

As the American Veterinary Medical Association states, "Veterinarians must promote the value of the exam and move away from their dependence on vaccine income."

Unfortunately, veterinarians stand to lose big, according to Dr. Ron Schultz, leading immunologist and outspoken critic of annual vaccine practices, when the numbers of those requesting vaccines drops.

Annual checkups are important to maintain and will help pick up on health concerns before they become a big problem. If vaccines are recommended, don't forget to ask about safety issues and studies to show they are needed. Ask about the blood test mentioned earlier. Do your own research and come to your own conclusions. Remember, medicine is always in a state of change and change we must in regards to pet vaccinations.