

Vaccinations For My Dog

Lucky for us, there are vaccines to help prevent many illnesses that affect dogs. Vaccinating your dog has long been considered one of the easiest ways to help him live a long, healthy life. Not only are there different vaccines for different diseases, there are different types and combinations of vaccines.

Although vaccination has the potential to protect pets against life-threatening diseases, vaccination is not without its risks. Recently, there has been some controversy regarding the duration of protection and timing of vaccination, as well as the safety and necessity of certain vaccines. What does this all mean for your dog? Vaccination is a procedure that has risks and benefits that must be weighed for every dog relative to his lifestyle and health. Your veterinarian can determine a vaccination regime that will provide the safest and best protection for your individual dog. Here are answers to some of your most frequently asked questions regarding vaccines:

What Exactly Are Vaccines?

Vaccines help prepare the body's immune system to fight the invasion of disease-causing organisms. Vaccines contain antigens, which look like the disease-causing organism to the immune system but don't actually cause disease. When the vaccine is introduced to the body, the immune system is mildly stimulated. If a dog is ever exposed to the real disease, his immune system is now prepared to recognize and fight it off entirely or reduce the severity of the illness.

How Important Are Vaccines to the Health of My Dog?

Bottom line—vaccines are very important in managing the health of your dog. That said, not every dog needs to be vaccinated against every disease. It is very important to discuss with your veterinarian a vaccination protocol that's right for your dog. Factors that should be examined include age, medical history, environment, travel habits and lifestyle. Most vets highly recommend administering core vaccines to healthy dogs.

What Are Core Vaccines?

In 2006, the American Animal Hospital Association's Canine Task Force published a revised version of guidelines regarding canine vaccinations. The guidelines divide vaccines into three categories—core, non-core and not recommended.

- Core vaccines are considered vital to all dogs based on risk of exposure, severity of disease or transmissibility to humans. Canine parvovirus, distemper, canine hepatitis and rabies are considered core vaccines by the Task Force.
- Non-core vaccines are given depending on the dog's exposure risk. These include vaccines against *Bordetella bronchiseptica*, *Borrelia burgdorferi* and *Leptospira* bacteria.

Your veterinarian can determine what vaccines are best for your dog.

What Vaccines Should My Puppy Get?

Puppies should receive a series of vaccinations with a combination vaccine product that protects against parvovirus, distemper and hepatitis. Your puppy must also be vaccinated against rabies. There are a variety of other vaccines that may or may not be appropriate for your pet.

Are Any Vaccines Required By Law?

Each state has its own laws governing the administration of the rabies vaccine. Some areas require yearly rabies vaccination. Other areas call for vaccines every three years. An up-to-date canine rabies vaccination is a legal requirement. Be sure to keep proof of your dog's rabies vaccines with his medical records.

How Often Should My Adult Dog Be Vaccinated?

Your veterinarian can best determine a vaccination schedule for your dog. This will depend on the type of vaccine, your dog's age, medical history, environment and lifestyle. Some adult dogs might receive certain vaccines annually, while other vaccines might be given every 3 years or longer.

When Should My Puppy Be Vaccinated?

If his mother has a healthy immune system, a puppy will most likely receive antibodies in mother's milk while nursing. Puppies should receive a series of vaccinations starting at six to eight weeks of age. A veterinarian should administer a minimum of three vaccinations at three- to four-week intervals. The final dose should be administered at 16 weeks of age.

Are There Any Risks Associated With Vaccines?

Immunizations mildly stimulate an animal's immune system in order to create protection from specific infectious diseases. This stimulation can create mild symptoms, ranging from soreness at the injection site to fever and allergic reactions. Another less common side effect is the development of immune mediated disease following vaccination.

That said, it is important to realize that vaccines have saved countless lives, and play a vital role in the battle against canine infectious disease. Additionally, rabies vaccinations have saved the lives of countless dogs—and many humans as well. In some developing countries, hundreds of people die each year due to rabies contracted from dog bites.

As with any medical procedure, there is a small chance of side effects. In most cases, the risks are much smaller than the risks of disease itself. But it is important to talk to your veterinarian about your dog's medical history before he is vaccinated.

What Symptoms Should I Look For?

Most dogs show no ill effect from vaccination. Vaccine reactions may be minor and short-lived or require immediate care from a veterinarian. Clinical signs include:

- Fever
- Sluggishness
- Loss of appetite
- Facial swelling and/or hives
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Pain, swelling, redness, scabbing or hair loss around the injection site
- Lameness
- Collapse
- Difficulty breathing
- Seizures

It is best to schedule your dog's appointment so that you can monitor him for any side effects following administration of the vaccine.

What Should I Do if I Think My Dog Is Having an Adverse Reaction to a Vaccine?

If you suspect your dog is having a reaction to a vaccine, call your veterinarian immediately.



Parvovirus

What Is Parvovirus?

Canine parvovirus is a highly contagious viral disease that can produce a life-threatening illness. The virus attacks rapidly dividing cells in a dog's body, most severely affecting the intestinal tract. Parvovirus also attacks the white blood cells, and when young animals are infected, the virus can damage the heart muscle and cause lifelong cardiac problems.

What Are the General Symptoms of Parvovirus?

The general symptoms of parvovirus are lethargy, severe vomiting, loss of appetite and bloody, foul-smelling diarrhea that can lead to life-threatening dehydration.

How Is Parvovirus Transmitted?

Parvovirus is extremely contagious and can be transmitted by any person, animal or object that comes in contact with an infected dog's feces. Highly resistant, the virus can live in the environment for months, and may survive on inanimate objects such as food bowls, shoes, clothes, carpet and floors. It is common for an unvaccinated dog to contract parvovirus from the streets, especially in urban areas where there are many dogs.

How Is Parvovirus Diagnosed?

Veterinarians diagnose parvovirus on the basis of clinical signs and laboratory testing. The Enzyme Linked ImmunoSorbant Assay (ELISA) test has become a common test for parvovirus. The ELISA test kit is used to detect parvovirus in a dog's stools, and is performed in the vet's office in about 15 minutes. Because this test is not 100% sensitive or specific, your veterinarian may recommend additional tests and bloodwork.

Which Dogs Are Prone to Parvovirus?

Puppies, adolescent dogs and canines who are not vaccinated are most susceptible to the virus. The canine parvovirus affects most members of the dog family (wolves, coyotes, foxes, etc.). Breeds at a higher risk are Rottweilers, Doberman pinschers, Labrador retrievers, American Staffordshire terriers and German shepherds.

How Can Parvovirus Be Prevented?

You can protect your dog from this potential killer by making sure he's up-to-date on his vaccinations. Parvovirus should be considered a core vaccine for all puppies and adult dogs. It is usually recommended that puppies be vaccinated with combination vaccines that take into account the risk factors for exposure to various diseases. One common vaccine, called a "5-in-1," protects the puppy from distemper, hepatitis, leptospirosis, parvovirus and parainfluenza.

Generally, the first vaccine is given at 6-8 weeks of age and a booster is given at four-week intervals until the puppy is 16-20 weeks of age, and then again at one year of age. A puppy's vaccination program is not complete before four months of age. Older dogs who have not received full puppy vaccination series may be susceptible to parvovirus and should also receive at least one immunization. Consult with your veterinarian about how often your dog will need to be revaccinated.

Because parvovirus can live in an environment for months, you will want to take extra care if there has been an infected dog in your house or yard. Some things are easier to clean and disinfect than others—and even with excellent cleaning, parvovirus can be difficult to eradicate. Parvo is resistant to many typical disinfectants. A solution of one part bleach to 32 parts water can be used where organic material is not present. The infected dog's toys, food dish and water bowl should be properly cleaned and then disinfected with this solution for 10 minutes. If not disinfected, these articles should be discarded. You can also use the solution on the soles of your shoes if you think you've walked through an infected area. Areas that are harder to clean (grassy areas, carpeting and wood, for example) may need to be sprayed with disinfectant, or even resurfaced.

How Can Parvovirus Be Treated?

Although there are no drugs available that can kill the virus yet, treatment is generally straightforward and consists of aggressive supportive care to control the symptoms and boost your dog's immune system to help him win the battle against this dangerous disease. Dogs infected with parvovirus need intensive treatment in a veterinary hospital, where they receive antibiotics, drugs to control the vomiting, intravenous fluids and other supportive therapies. Should your dog undergo this treatment, be prepared for considerable expense—the average hospital stay is about 5-7 days.

Please note that treatment is not always successful—so it's especially important to make sure your dog is vaccinated.

What Are Some Home Treatment Options?

Because parvovirus is such a serious disease, it is not recommended to attempt home treatment. Even with the best veterinary care, this disease is often fatal.

When Is it Time to See the Vet?

If you notice your dog experiencing severe vomiting, loss of appetite, depression or bloody diarrhea, contact your veterinarian immediately.

What Are Some Other Health Issues with These Same Symptoms?

A puppy with a bloody diarrhea could have a parasite problem, a virus other than parvovirus, a stress colitis, or may have eaten something that disagreed with him or injured and blocked his digestive tract. It's crucial that you see your vet for an accurate diagnosis.

