COMMON QUESTIONS

from Pet Parents About Vaccinations

Because pet parents have questions about vaccination, this guide has been developed to support you and your colleagues in responding to some common client concerns. Helping pet parents understand why we vaccinate pets and the vaccines you are recommending can help them appreciate and agree to help keep their beloved pets protected from disease with regular vaccinations.

The questions are general in nature, so feel free to tailor the responses to your local situation.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS BY OWNERS ABOUT VACCINES AND VACCINATION

How do vaccinations work? The immune system fights off infections in your pet's body and, importantly, 'remembers' the infectious organism so that the next time it meets the organism, it is able to fight it off more rapidly and efficiently.

A vaccination stimulates your pet's immune system by mimicking the infectious organism but without causing the disease. This enables the immune system to remember the organism and be prepared to tackle it but without having to experience the disease first. In essence, a vaccine 'teaches' the body to defend itself against the infection before it gets sick.

If my pet isn't feeling well, is it still acceptable for him or her to be vaccinated? Being healthy at the time of vaccination is usually recommended. If you have any questions, contact us before bringing your pet in.

What happens if my pet misses a vaccination or booster? All pets require vaccination at specific intervals throughout their lives to help keep them protected from disease. It is very important that your pet receives all recommended vaccinations at the appropriate time. If you miss a dose, contact our office as soon as you can, and we will make an appointment to get your pet back on schedule.

Is every vaccination you are recommending required or mandatory? Some vaccines, such as rabies, may be legally required. Vaccines referred to as 'core' vaccines are strongly recommended for all dogs and cats because they protect against significant disease threats. Other vaccinations, referred to as 'non-core', may also be recommended, depending on your pets lifestyle or the area in which you live. We will recommend which vaccines are right for your pet.

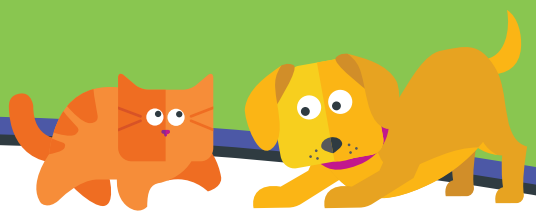
Can my pregnant dog or cat be vaccinated? Vaccines that have been tested and shown to be safe for use during pregnancy can be used if needed; however, we generally advise avoiding any unnecessary medical or surgical procedure during pregnancy since unexpected problems may occasionally occur. In the case of vaccination, it may be better to plan ahead and vaccinate before your dog or cat mates if she would be due a regular booster while pregnant. Contact us to discuss your options.

Do older pets still need to be vaccinated? The short answer is 'yes'. Older pets can still suffer from infectious diseases. The lifestyle of your pet, however, may change as he or she ages, which may mean that some of the optional, 'non-core' vaccines that your pet has routinely been given are no longer considered necessary. Our office can provide more specific advice on this.

Humans don't get vaccinated each year so why would my pet need to receive a vaccine annually? The duration of immunity following vaccination can vary depending on the type of vaccine used and on the individual animal. Some vaccines provide protection that lasts for at least 3 years. In these cases, we advise re-vaccination at 3-year intervals. Other vaccines, however, do not provide protection that lasts as long. In this case, a 'booster' vaccination, given annually, is a highly effective way of helping to keep your pet protected from disease.

Why does my puppy or kitten require repeated vaccinations? There are 2 main reasons. First, some vaccines require 2 or more doses to be given initially a few weeks apart to ensure they stimulate a full protective immunity. Secondly, for a period of time, young pets are protected by antibodies they receive from their mother (mostly in the first milk). Over the first few weeks or months of life, however, these maternal antibodies fade, leaving pets vulnerable to many infectious diseases. Although maternal antibodies are important for early protection, they can interfere with vaccination. Thus, repeat doses of vaccine are often required to ensure that vaccine immunity is triggered when pets are at their most vulnerable.

Why does my adult pet require booster vaccinations? Immunity is established in young puppies



and kittens following their initial vaccination course; unfortunately, this immunity may not last for life. They will normally need regular booster doses every 1 to 3 years depending on the vaccine. By 'reminding' the immune system in this way, booster vaccinations help keep your pet protected over time.

Does my pet need to be vaccinated if it stays indoors all the time? Dangerous germs can be anywhere, even indoors. Diseases and organisms that may infect your pet can be carried into your home by visitors, other pets, or unwanted house guests such as rodents or bats. There is risk, too, if your pet ventures outside or travels to a boarding facility or groomer. Vaccination will help protect your pet from disease.

Do I need to vaccinate if my pet doesn't go to catteries/boarding facilities? Some diseases pose a risk to all dogs and cats, even if they are never boarded. These are referred to as 'core' diseases and the vaccines that protect against them are known as 'core' vaccines. All dogs and cats should be vaccinated with their respective core vaccines. Although pets in boarding establishments may be at risk for other (non-core) diseases (such as canine cough in dogs), many pets that are not boarded will also be at risk for these diseases because of their particular lifestyle. We can provide advice on which vaccines are right for your pet.

Why does my pet need an examination before being vaccinated? Vaccinations are most effective when your pet is healthy, which is why examinations are often performed before a vaccine is given. Health checks also allow us to identify any problems your pet might be having and to address those issues appropriately.

Is there any chance my pet will get sick even after being vaccinated? Today's vaccines are highly effective in protecting pets against disease. However, as is the case with people, each pet's body has a different capability to defend itself against a disease, even after being vaccinated. While some animals exposed to a disease after being vaccinated may not be able to fully fight off infection, vaccination is generally effective and is an important way to help keep your pet protected from disease.

How can I tell if my pet is having an adverse reaction to a vaccine? Just like humans, pets may have mild reactions to a vaccination (such as slight soreness or a slight fever) that can last a day or two after the injection. In most cases, these reactions quickly go away on their own. However, if your pet shows more serious reactions, such as vomiting, diarrhea, bumpy or itchy skin, swelling (especially around the face or eyes), coughing or difficulty breathing, or weakness in the limbs, call our office immediately so we can discuss the best course of action.

May I have my pet's antibody titer measured before I decide to booster-vaccinate? Your pet's titer can be measured for some diseases but not for all. Even so, there are a number of issues that make titer measuring complicated. Although a high titer means your pet may be well protected, many pets can have a low titer and still be protected. Titer-testing also costs money and in a number of cases, the result will confirm that your pet should have a booster vaccination. Also, because a titer is within recommended levels today, there is no guarantee as to how long it will stay at that level. Vaccination schedules have been carefully developed to ensure a pet remains protected over time, so it is generally recommended that you have your pet vaccinated according to that schedule.

We hope these questions assist you in having conversations with pet owners about helping to protect their pets and their families from disease.

MERCK Animal Health