

FROM THE VETERINARIAN

As professional caretakers of animals, you are frequently in a position to correctly advise people on how to care for animals, and also how to start out on the right foot with their veterinary care.

Vaccinating a pet against major diseases is one of the more important ways you can assure it enjoys a healthy life. Given properly, a vaccine is as valuable as an insurance policy. Given incorrectly it is worthless and gives the owner a false sense of security.

The following are some general rules of advice in vaccinating a dog or cat. (Always consult your local veterinarian for an exact schedule for your area of the country and your unique situation.)

Generally a puppy or kitten should be seen at an early age to check for parasites, congenital defects, and worms. Most veterinarians start the vaccination schedule between 6 and 8 weeks of age.

Most schedules include a series of boosters of the vaccine around 16 weeks. This series gives the animal sufficient immunity to prevent the disease. Only giving one vaccine or giving the vaccine at the wrong time is near worthless.

Secondly, no vaccine is "good for life" in pets. Annual revaccination, once grown, is a must. Most vaccines for puppies include:

(1) **Distemper**: a highly contagious virus found everywhere in our country. It affects primarily the respiratory and nervous system. The mortality is very high. Also, dog distemper is in no way related to cat distemper. They are two separate viruses and diseases.

(2) **Parvovirus**: a virus that causes rapid onset diarrhea and vomiting. This is a very common disease with frequently fatal results.

(3) **Corona virus**: a virus that causes diarrhea and vomiting also. This can occur simultaneously with Parvo.

(4) **Parainfluenza**: a virus that is one of the main components of "kennel cough".

(5) **Canine Adenovirus, Type 1 and Type 2**: Type 1 causes infectious hepatitis and possible

kidney damage. Type 2 is a factor in many respiratory coughs.

(6) **Canine Leptospirosis**: a bacterial disease carried by many wild and farm animals. Often infection is contracted from exposure to these animals or to contaminated water.

Other viruses may be added to the vaccination schedule or subtracted from this schedule by your veterinarian.

Rabies vaccination is a must for pets, whether they are inside pets or not. Inside pets not vaccinated are very susceptible to rabies. Statistically, we now have more cases of rabies in cats than in dogs. Many areas of the country are hotbeds for rabies in the wildlife population. Each state has different laws and regulations for rabies vaccination, so ask your local veterinarian.

Young cats have their own distinct diseases that we should try to prevent with vaccination:

(1) **Feline Pomleukopenia**: sometimes called "**feline distemper**" causes severe vomiting, diarrhea and a drop in the white blood cell count.

Editor's Note:

It's important to note that feline distemper and canine parvovirus are very contagious without proper immunization. Even if your pet doesn't come into contact with other animals, it can still become infected. The viruses are expelled in an infected animal's feces and vomitus and they can stay alive on the ground for up to 1 year. People can carry them around on the bottoms of shoes. If a dog that isn't properly vaccinated chews on a stick or a blade of grass that's contaminated with the parvo virus, or if he just walks through a contaminated area and then licks his paws, there's a good chance he'll contract the disease without proper vaccination. Cats contract the distemper virus in much the same way. However, it's important to note that the dog parvovirus can't infect cats and the cat distemper virus can't infect dogs.