

CANINE VACCINATIONS

PET CARE TIPS

Fortunately, in Australia we see fewer highly infectious diseases in dogs than are common in other countries around the world. However, outbreaks of canine infectious disease do occur from time to time around the country, and Canine Cough is very common.

How do vaccines work?

Vaccines contain small quantities of altered or "killed" viruses, bacteria or other disease-causing organisms. When administered, they stimulate your dog's immune system to produce disease-fighting cells and proteins – or antibodies – to protect against disease.

What to vaccinate against

In our area, adult dogs require vaccination against Parvovirus, Distemper, Adenovirus (Hepatitis) and the two most common forms of Canine Cough, Parainfluenza & Bordetella bronchiseptica.

If you are travelling with your pet there are additional vaccinations that may be required (Leptospirosis & Coronavirus). We are fortunate that Rabies is not a problem in Australia, so unless you are travelling overseas with your pet, this vaccine will not be required.

Parvovirus

The main source of Parvovirus is the faeces of infected dogs, where the virus can survive for several months, even during winter. It is easily transmitted via the feet of other dogs and humans; therefore direct contact is not required. Outbreaks have occurred in and around South East Queensland in recent times, and as we are a holiday destination, cases are seen in our area. Although the virus is closely related to Feline Parvovirus, it can't be passed between cats and dogs.

Clinical signs usually appear in seven to ten days and may include severe vomiting, diarrhoea, a lack of appetite, depression and fever. Young puppies are often most severely affected.

As this is a virus there is no treatment to kill the disease. The intestinal lining is extremely affected, which results in dangerous dehydration, electrolyte imbalances and infection in the bloodstream (septicaemia). The virus can damage the heart muscle and cause lifelong cardiac problems. Aggressive treatment is required at an early stage for any chance of survival and mortality rates are extremely high if left untreated.

Distemper

Distemper is a highly contagious viral disease, spread primarily by direct contact between dogs. It is thankfully rare these days, however stray dogs may be a source of the virus. Signs are fever, loss of appetite, a thick yellow discharge from the nose and eyes, coughing, diarrhoea, seizures, loss of balance and blindness.

There is no drug to kill the virus once contracted and it may be fatal even with treatment. Treatment includes cough suppressants, drugs to control the seizures and intensive nursing care. Some dogs may be left with persistent twitches and recurrent seizures.

Adenovirus (Hepatitis)

This is another disease that can be fatal, although it has become uncommon in areas where dogs are routinely vaccinated. Hepatitis can cause a range of symptoms, which can include any of the following; fever, loss of appetite, lethargy, runny nose, watery eyes, cough, vomiting, bleeding under the skin, jaundice, swelling, fluid accumulation, increased thirst and urination, and seizures. As with all viral diseases, treatment is aimed at managing the symptoms. Hepatitis usually results in permanent and irreversible liver damage.

Parainfluenza and Bordetella bronchiseptica

Parainfluenza is the viral component of canine cough. Bordetella is the bacterial component. It is a highly contagious and extremely incapacitating disease. Although also known as kennel cough, it is not just found in boarding kennels. It is usually spread by droplet from an infected dog, but it does not require direct dog-to-dog contact; it may be caught from sharing a water dish. A persistent dry cough with a 'honking' sound in an otherwise healthy dog is the main sign of this disease.

Dogs with Canine cough should be immediately isolated from other dogs. Symptoms gradually decrease and disappear after three weeks; however, the dog may remain infectious long after the symptoms have cleared. Although this disease is not usually fatal, it can lead to other fatal diseases. In older or immune compromised dogs, a fatal pneumonia may develop.

Why to vaccinate

Your dog's vaccination visit is one of the most important things you can do to give them a long and healthy life. Pets age differently to us - one year for them is like five years for us. So, the annual check-up that is part of a vaccination visit not only allows your Veterinarian to vaccinate against the common canine diseases; they will check the health of their teeth, ears, eyes, and skin, and examine them for early signs of disease as they get older. An annual health check is strongly recommended, even if your pet is not to be vaccinated.

Some of the diseases we vaccinate against are airborne (such as canine cough) or can be brought into the home on your shoes (e.g. parvovirus), so your dog doesn't need to come in direct contact with another dog, or even leave the house, to become infected.

Annual vaccinations are also required if your dog is to go to a boarding kennel or an obedience school. Unvaccinated animals will not be accepted in these situations.

As with humans, an unvaccinated animal increases the risk for all dogs. Vaccination can never be 100% guaranteed. There is a very small number of animals that may not develop the required level of immunity due to stress, illness or genetic factors - they may still be susceptible to infection. They will be reliant on 'herd protection' to assist their health.

When should my dog be vaccinated?

The immunity that a puppy gains from its mother's milk begins to diminish sometime after 6 weeks of age. As their own immune system is not fully developed until around four months, a course of three initial vaccinations are required to gain the maximum level of protection.

As the level of immunity your dog gains will diminish with time, annual boosters are the best way to ensure continued protection against these serious and potentially fatal diseases.

Any vaccine may prove ineffective if your dog has a fever at the time of vaccination, so the Veterinarian will always do a health check before giving the injection.

Initial Vaccination Timetable:-

6 – 8 Weeks First Vaccination – Distemper, Parvo, Hepatitis

10 – 12 Weeks Booster Vaccination – also includes Parainfluenza & Bordatella

16 Weeks Final Vaccination – Distemper, Parvo, Hepatitis

We don't recommend allowing your puppy to mix with unvaccinated dogs until two weeks after their second vaccination. Early socialisation is best done at an indoor puppy pre-school.

Adverse Reactions

Australia has a very high level of regulation regarding the safety of vaccinations and possible side effects are considerably less of a risk than potentially exposing your pet to a serious disease. However, as vaccines stimulate your pet's immune system so a very small percentage of animals may experience a reaction such as sensitivity at the injection site, lethargy, depression or fever. These symptoms are generally mild and will pass within a day or two but should be reported to your Veterinarian so future vaccination protocols for your pet can be adjusted.

If your pet experiences any of the following more serious symptoms, take them to the Veterinarian immediately:

- weakness
- breathing difficulties
- vomiting
- loss of appetite
- diarrhoea

We report every adverse reaction and in 25 years have only seen one or two serious reactions, though we have seen many terrible cases of preventable disease.