



# COMMON QUESTIONS

## from Pet Owners About Vaccinations

Because pet owners have questions about vaccination, this guide has been developed to support you and your colleagues in responding to some common client concerns. Helping owners understand why we vaccinate pets and the vaccines you are recommending can help them appreciate and agree to provide the best possible protection for their beloved pets.

This edition of common vaccination questions and responses is the first in a series you will be receiving. 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

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**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 swiftly and efficiently.

A vaccination stimulates your pet's immune system by mimicking the infectious organism but in a safe way, 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.

**Do all pets receive the same amount of vaccine?**

Yes. Since vaccines work by stimulating the immune system, a small dog, for instance, receives the same amount of vaccine as a large one.

**If my pet isn't feeling well, is it still acceptable for him or her to be vaccinated?**

While it is possible for a pet that's not feeling well 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 ensure they are fully protected. 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 for your type of pet or for the area in which you live. Other vaccinations, referred to as 'non-core', may also be recommended, depending on your pet's lifestyle. 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 mates if she would be due a regular booster while pregnant. Alternatively, it may be possible to safely delay the booster until after the pregnancy and birth—we will be able to advise you in this situation.

**Do older pets still need to be vaccinated?**

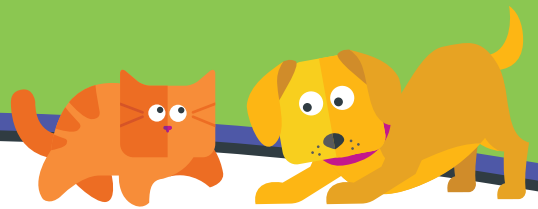
The short answer is 'yes'. Older pets can still suffer from infectious diseases. The lifestyle of your pet, however, may change as he or she ages, which may mean that some of the optional, 'non-core' vaccines that your pet has routinely been given are no longer considered necessary. In addition, your pet may no longer need to be re-vaccinated every year. 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 every 1 to 3 years, is a highly effective way of ensuring that every pet remains fully protected, thereby minimising the risk of infectious 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, your pet will remain fully protected over time.

**Does my pet need to be vaccinated if they stay indoors all the time?** Even indoor pets require vaccination. 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.

**Do I need to vaccinate if my pet doesn't go to catteries/boarding facilities?** Yes. 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 your pet needs.

**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. If an animal is exposed to a disease shortly after being vaccinated, its body may not have had enough time to develop enough immunity to fight off the infection. Still, vaccination is the best way to prevent your pet from getting an illness.

**How can I tell if my pet is having an adverse reaction to a vaccine?** Just like children or adults, 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. If your pet shows more serious reactions, however, such as vomiting or diarrhoea, 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 that your pet can be examined.

**May I have my pet's antibody titre measured before I decide to booster-vaccinate?** Your pet's titre can be measured for some diseases but not for all. Even so, there are a number of issues that make titre measuring complicated. Although a high titre means your pet is well-protected, many pets can have a low titre and still be protected. Titre-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 titre 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 protecting their pets and their families against disease threats.**

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