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VACCINATIONS IN DOGS AND CATS

Timing of vaccinations

Puppies can be vaccinated from 6 weeks of age, with a second vaccination 4 weeks later. Kittens can be vaccinated from 8 weeks of age, with a second vaccination 3-4 weeks later.

Many people believe that if they have their pet vaccinated when it is a kitten or puppy the immunity it receives will protect it for the rest of its life. Unfortunately this is not the case. After the last injection immunity reaches a peak and then begins to decline, until the level of protection is no longer sufficient to protect your pet. Re-vaccination stimulates the immune system so that protection is maintained.

After the initial course a booster vaccination is recommended annually. If your pet has become overdue, they may need to re-start the course and have two injections like a puppy or kitten.

Below is some information about the diseases we vaccinate against, and why it is so important keep them up to date.

Dog vaccinations

DHP

This vaccination protects against Distemper, Infectious Hepatitis (adenovirus) and Parvovirus. These are all potentially fatal diseases. Parvovirus outbreaks still occur not infrequently in the UK; it is highly contagious and is spread between dogs via direct contact and also contact with faeces. It can be especially severe in puppies and causes sudden and severe vomiting and diarrhoea. After the 1st year booster, dogs are only vaccinated against these diseases every 3 years.

It is possible to do 'titre testing' for the DHP part of the vaccination. This means taking a blood sample, which is sent to the lab to check whether a dog has a protective level of immune response and whether they need re-vaccination that year. Our vets will be happy to discuss this further with you.

LEPTOSPIROSIS

This is a bacterial infection which affects the kidneys and liver. It is spread by rats and dirty water and can be passed to humans ('Weil's disease'). 'L4' vaccination covers all strains you can currently vaccinate against. Protection with this vaccination only lasts for 1 year, which is why we recommend a booster for all dogs every year.

It is not possible to do 'titre testing' for the leptospirosis vaccination.

KENNEL COUGH

This is caused by a number of different viruses and bacteria. It is spread via the air and also anywhere dogs meet nose to nose, such as at kennels, at the park, training class etc. Symptoms include a dry, harsh cough - often misinterpreted as the dog having "something stuck in their throat". Kennel Cough vaccination protects against two common causes of Kennel Cough (Parainfluenza virus and Bordetella Bronchiseptica bacteria), but not all possible causes. This is an optional vaccination and is administered via your dog's nostril. It is worth getting vaccinated against, especially if your dog mixes with lots of other dogs. Your dog may need it before going into kennels, as most kennels demand it is done at least 2 weeks prior to kennelling. Protection only lasts a year, so a yearly booster is recommended.

Cat vaccinations

CAT FLU AND ENTERITIS

Cat flu vaccination protects against disease caused by Feline Herpes Virus and Feline Calicivirus. The symptoms of cat flu include sneezing, conjunctivitis, loss of appetite and depressed demeanour, and can be severe. Feline enteritis virus is related to Parvovirus in dogs, causing severe diarrhoea and often death. This combined vaccination is recommended for all cats (even indoor only cats) and a yearly booster is usually advised.

It is possible to do 'titre testing' for this part of the vaccination. This means taking a blood sample, which is sent to the lab to check whether a cat has a protective level of immune response and whether they need re-vaccination that year. Our vets will be happy to discuss this further with you.

FELINE LEUKAEMIA VIRUS (FeLV)

This virus can cause leukaemia, tumours, anaemia and also immune-suppression making the cat more susceptible to other infections. FeLV can be spread through fighting, mutual grooming, and through sharing food/water bowls and litter trays. Any cat who has access to outside or mixes with other cats of unknown status may be at risk of contracting the virus, so vaccination is recommended.

Other vaccinations

RABIES

This is a fatal disease of the nervous system, which is currently not present in the UK. If you wish to take your pet abroad with you, they will need to have a rabies vaccination as part of the pet passport.

Dogs that are travelling to parts of southern Europe may also benefit from vaccination against a disease called Leishmaniasis; the vet will be able to advise further.

Side effects of vaccination

Side effects of vaccinations are not common, but the vet will be happy to discuss them with you if you have any concerns. Puppies and kittens may be quiet for a day and may get a raised temperature. Sometimes a non-painful swelling can appear at the site of injection. More severe side effects are very rare. The most significant and well publicised side effect is fibrosarcoma in cats - a tumour at the injection site, which has been linked to non-vaccine injections as well. This is very rare (probably less than 1 in 20,000 vaccinations). Severe allergic reactions are also documented but are very rare. The benefits of vaccination far outweigh any side effects in the vast majority of cats and dogs.