

Dog Care – Diseases and Vaccinations

Posted on [December 17, 2010](#) by [Graham](#)

Protecting your best friend

One of the most important things you can do to give your dog a long and healthy life is to ensure that he is vaccinated against common canine diseases. Your dog's mother gave her puppy immunity from disease for the first few weeks of existence by providing disease-fighting antibodies in her milk. After that period it's up to you, with the help and advice of your veterinarian – to provide that protection.

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.

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. It is then usually time to begin the initial vaccinations, which will be repeated until the puppy is about 10 to 12 weeks old. Thereafter, your dog will require repeat vaccination at regular intervals for the rest of his or her life. As vaccines vary in the duration of immunity they provide, above all, follow the vaccination schedule recommended by your veterinarian.

Which vaccinations should my dog receive?

Your pet should be protected against those diseases which are most common, highly contagious and which cause serious illness. Such diseases could include Canine Distemper, Infectious Canine Hepatitis, Canine Parvovirus and Canine Tracheobronchitis (Kennel Cough). Other vaccinations may be recommended, based on your veterinarian's evaluation of the risks posed by such factors as your dog's particular heredity, environment and lifestyle.

1. Canine Distemper

Vaccination against this often fatal, hard-to-treat disease is absolutely essential. Highly contagious, it is spread by discharges from the noses and eyes of infected dogs. Symptoms can include listlessness, fever, coughing, diarrhoea and vomiting; convulsions and paralysis may occur in the disease's final stages. The distemper virus attacks many organs, including the nervous system, which may be permanently damaged, even if the dog recovers.

2. Canine Tracheobronchitis (KENNEL COUGH)

Just as with the human common cold, this respiratory-tract infection is easily transmitted from one dog to another, so vaccination is imperative if your pet will come in contact with many other dogs in such situations as obedience training or boarding at a kennel. Caused by various airborne bacteria and viruses, including Canine Parainfluenza virus, Canine Adenovirus Type II and Bordetella bronchiseptica, you'll first notice its onset by your dog's dry, hacking cough.

3. Canine Parvovirus

Very contagious, debilitating and widespread, the disease caused by this virus emerged in many parts of the world only in 1978. Spread through infected faeces, the highly resistant virus can

remain in the environment for many months. Symptoms include high fever, listlessness, vomiting and bloody diarrhoea. Vaccination is the only certain method of preventing this potentially fatal disease, which is most severe in young pups and elderly dogs.

4. Infectious Canine Hepatitis

Caused by Canine Adenovirus Type I, this disease is transmitted among dogs by contact with secretions, such as saliva, infected urine or faeces. Its symptoms are similar to those of the early stages of distemper. Causing liver failure, eye damage and breathing problems, the course of this disease can range from mild to fatal. Dogs which survive the acute disease may become chronically infected and have long term liver problems. Vaccination remains the best protection.

5. Leptospirosis

A bacterial disease which attacks the liver and kidneys. Many dogs show no signs but can rapidly develop fever, weakness, vomiting, jaundice and haemorrhage. Death often follows from liver or kidney failure. Dogs that survive may go on to develop chronic liver or kidney problems. Dogs in the northern and central regions of the North Island of NZ are at the highest risk. If you live in a high-risk region, or are travelling there with your dog, vaccination is highly recommended.

How effective is vaccination?

Like any drug treatment or surgical procedure, vaccinations cannot be 100% guaranteed. However, used in conjunction with proper nutrition and acceptable sanitary conditions, vaccination is clearly your pet's best defense against disease. Plus, when you consider what treating a serious illness can cost you and your beloved dog in terms of both money and distress, prevention through vaccination is extremely cost-effective.