



An Ounce of Prevention

I'm sure you have noticed that veterinary care is expensive and getting more expensive every year. According to vetinfo.com, the cost of veterinary care for the first year of a puppy or kitten's life is \$350 to \$800 minimum; every year after that you can expect to pay \$300 to \$625. These figures include healthy pet examinations, annual vaccines and monthly flea and heartworm prevention, but the figures don't include any unexpected illnesses or injuries that may arise.

Preventing disease is the best investment you can make in your pet's health. Treating some illnesses and injuries after they have happened can be so cost prohibitive that with a catastrophic event, many people only have the financial option of euthanasia. So, let's talk about what you can prevent.

Injuries

Outdoor cats and free roaming dogs are obviously at a much greater risk of being hit by a car, attacked by other animals or getting fighting injuries. Keeping your pets confined by a leash or fence reduces these risks tremendously. An indoor cat's average life span is 12-18 years, outdoor cats life span is reduced to 4-5 years.

Illnesses/Diseases

Feline Aids (FIV) – FIV attacks a cat's immune system much like AIDS in humans but it is species specific meaning it affects cats only; it is not contagious to dogs or humans. There is no cure, but once FIV is contracted a cat can live up to 10 years. FIV is transmitted from cat to cat by blood and saliva as well as from a mother to kitten through her milk. **Prevention: vaccination (if your cat's lifestyle demands it), keep indoors, limit access to unknown or unvaccinated cats.**

Feline Leukemia (FeLV) – In the U.S. it is estimated that 2-3% of all cats are infected with FeLV. FeLV is caused by a virus that is a form of cancer of the blood cells called lymphocytes, or leukemia. All cats are at risk of infection but ill, young or senior cats have a higher risk of infection. FeLV is spread through saliva, nasal secretions, urine, feces and milk. **Prevention: vaccination (if your cat's lifestyle demands it), keep indoors, limit access to unknown or unvaccinated cats.**

Feline Distemper (Panleukopenia) – Feline Distemper is caused by the feline Parvo virus and is not related to canine Distemper. This virus attacks the lining of the intestines causing diarrhea, dehydration and anemia. Without extensive medical treatment this virus has an 85% mortality rate. The mortality rate decreases with treatment but is often still fatal. The virus is spread through all body secretions including feces, vomit, urine,

saliva and mucous. **Prevention: vaccination, keep indoors, limit access to unknown or unvaccinated cats.**

Heartworm Disease – This affects dogs and cats alike. Heartworms are transmitted by mosquitoes, so the risk of infection is higher in places that have a high mosquito population like the Midwest and coastal areas but it is prevalent in all 50 states. Heartworm larvae is injected into the bloodstream by a mosquito and grow from larvae to adult worms as they migrate to the heart and lungs resulting in death. There is treatment for dogs, but no treatment available for cats. **Prevention: monthly dewormers such as HeartGard, Sentinel, Interceptor or Revolution. These are prescription only and can not be given to a heartworm positive pet, so before starting on prevention, a heartworm test must be performed by your veterinarian. Medication must be given monthly, year round and your dog must be tested annually.**

Intestinal parasites – Roundworms, Hookworms, Whipworms, Tapeworms, Coccidia and Giardia are all intestinal parasites that pose a threat to our pets and sometimes us. Many of these parasites are zoonotic, meaning they can be transmitted to humans. All dogs and cats should be checked at least annually for intestinal parasites. Treating them on your own by giving over the counter products is generally a waste of time and money due to their ineffectiveness – prescription strength dewormers are recommended. When you have children, ill or senior people in your home, prevention is extremely important. Intestinal parasites are transmitted by contact with an infected pet or contact with infected ground. **Prevention: monthly dewormers listed above and annual stool checks and preventative deworming.**

Parvo Virus – Parvo is very deadly and one of the most common infectious diseases that affects dogs. It is transmitted through feces but the virus can stay alive for months on clothes, concrete and kennel floors and for years in the soil. Your dog can also come into contact with the Parvo from wild animals tracking the virus into your yard or rain water running through your yard spreading the disease. Parvo is most prevalent in very young or ill dogs; black and tan breeds such as Rottweilers and Dobermans as well as Labradors are more susceptible than other breeds. **Prevention: A series of vaccinations starting at the age of 6-8 weeks old, no access to unknown or unvaccinated dogs and areas that those dogs are prone to be in such as dog parks, neighborhood outings and pet store floors. Enrolling a puppy in an indoor group obedience class is fine after the second round of vaccines.**

Kennel Cough (KC) – This is an upper respiratory infection that is very contagious via the air. There are several different upper respiratory infections that are generally lumped under the title Kennel Cough. The symptoms include a dry hacking cough, nasal and sometimes eye discharge. Most dogs will come into contact with and possibly show signs of KC at some point in their lives. The infections are generally mild and treated easily by a veterinarian, but like most other diseases, the very young, ill and seniors are more likely to get a serious infection. **Prevention: There are vaccines for Bordetella and Para-influenza, but they are not 100% effective and most often will just lessen the severity of the infection. It is best to keep the more susceptible dogs away from**

unvaccinated, unknown dogs and dogs that are showing signs of coughing, sneezing or eye discharge.

Canine Influenza – This is a highly contagious respiratory infection caused by a virus. There is a mild form and a severe form. The mild form symptoms are a moist cough that persists for up to a month, although some dogs will have a dry cough similar to KC. Dogs with a severe form will develop a high fever and have clinical signs of pneumonia. The first outbreak of Canine Influenza was in 2004 and to date has not been deemed zoonotic. Prevention: **There is a vaccine that does not keep a dog from contracting the disease, but does lessen the severity of the infection. The vaccine is recommended for dogs that come into contact with many other dogs such as boarding, day care or grooming facilities.**

There are several insurance plans available for pets. I compared 3 different plans for a 5 year old dog with a \$50-\$100 deductible and found that you can expect to pay anywhere from \$27 to \$95 per month, per dog (\$324 - \$1140 annually). If you decide to buy insurance for your pet, read over the contract very carefully to see what is and what is not covered!

Your veterinarian should help you decide what vaccine protocol is right for your pet. Take some extra time with your vet at your next visit to discuss what vaccines are needed for your pet based on age, breed, health, geographic area, travel and your pet's normal activities.

Two ways to cut down on veterinary expenses are:

*Early Detection! Performing Home Health Exams helps you catch illnesses, injuries and unpreventable maladies, keeping the cost of treatment down.

*Prevention! It is much more cost effective to prevent rather than to treat!

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