

Vaccinations: questions and answers

All vaccines have potential side effects. A veterinarian should assess your pet's risks before vaccinating, and then on a yearly basis.

When should vaccinations begin?

Your puppy or kitten should get his or her first vaccination at 6-8 weeks of age. During this first visit your new pet will also have a first treatment for roundworms. In addition, kittens should be tested for the feline leukemia virus (FeLV) before being introduced to other cats in the home. It is recommended that all new pets receive a thorough physical exam by a doctor.

How many vaccinations will be needed?

Puppies need a DHPP vaccination every 3 weeks until they are at least 4 months old, a booster of Adult DHP in 1 year, and then a booster of Adult DHP every 3 years. Purebred Rottweilers, Dobermans, Staffordshire Terriers, and Pit Bulls need an additional DHPP vaccination at 5 months of age. Parainfluenza/Bordetella vaccine, if recommended, should be given yearly. Leptospirosis vaccine should be given yearly to dogs that have an active outdoors lifestyle. The first RABIES vaccine is given at 4 months, a booster given in 1 year, then a booster given every 3 years.

Kittens need a FVRCP vaccination every 3 weeks until they are at least 14 weeks old, a booster given in 1 year, and then a booster given every 3 years. The first RABIES vaccine may be given at 3 months, then a booster given yearly. FeLV vaccinations are first given at 9 weeks of age or older, a booster given in 3 to 4 weeks, then a booster given yearly. FeLV vaccinations are recommended only for cats that may have exposure to other cats of unknown FeLV status.

Why are so many vaccinations necessary?

Puppies and kittens receive antibodies from the mother while in the womb and from the milk (colostrum) in the first few days of nursing. These maternal antibodies temporarily protect them from disease while the young animals' own immune systems are maturing. However, as long as maternal antibody levels are high, they interfere with vaccinations. Once their levels have declined, the puppy or kitten can be successfully vaccinated-- but only if his or her own immune system is mature enough to respond to the vaccine. For each individual puppy or kitten, the rate at which maternal antibodies drop and the immune system matures is quite variable (puppies: between 6 and 18 weeks; 6 and 20 weeks for the breeds mentioned above-- kittens: between 6 and 14 weeks). Therefore, vaccinations should be given every 3 weeks throughout this period.

Is it necessary to vaccinate very old animals, or animals that always stay indoors?

Yes! Older animals, like older people, have decreased immunity. A disease which may cause only mild illness in a younger animal can be deadly to an older one. Many of the diseases we vaccinate for are

highly contagious and can be carried through the air, on the skin and clothes of people, or in the urine and feces of animals. Even a brief trip outside, to the groomer, or to the veterinary hospital may leave your pet exposed. We recommend vaccinations throughout the life of your pet in conjunction with yearly risk assessment by a veterinarian.

What diseases are dogs and cats vaccinated for?

DOGS:

- **Distemper:** A viral disease causing fever, diarrhea, respiratory problems, and convulsions. Often fatal.
- **Hepatitis:** A viral disease that attacks the liver and other organs.
- **Parainfluenza:** A highly contagious, airborne virus. Causes a harsh, hacking cough (one form of “kennel cough”). Vaccine only partially protective.
- **Parvovirus:** Highly contagious. Causes severe bloody diarrhea, vomiting, and fever. Can be fatal.
- **Rabies:** A viral disease causing temperament changes, inability to swallow, and convulsions. Ultimately fatal. Affects almost all warm-blooded animals, including humans.
- **Leptospirosis:** A bacterial disease transmitted through contaminated water. Causes fever, vomiting, liver and kidney failure. Potentially contagious to humans.

CATS:

- **Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis:** A highly contagious, upper respiratory virus causing sneezing, discharge from eyes and nose, and corneal ulcers.
- **Calicivirus:** Causes upper respiratory symptoms.
- **Panleukopenia:** “Feline distemper”. Causes severe diarrhea, vomiting, and dehydration. Often fatal.
- **Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV):** Causes many varied symptoms including fever, weight loss, chronic illness, leukemia, and cancers. Usually fatal once clinical signs develop.
- **Rabies:** A viral disease causing temperament changes, inability to swallow, and convulsions. Ultimately fatal. Affects almost all warm-blooded animals, including humans.