

Ask the Vet



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Dr. Andress is the co-owner of Gate City Animal Hospital in Greensboro, which was established in 1997. He received his B.S. in Microbiology from Clemson University, then went on to obtain his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from the University of Georgia. His work has been published in several veterinary medicine journals and he has spoken at local and national veterinary conferences. His special interests are in surgery and internal medicine.

WHAT IS THE PROPER VACCINATION PROTOCOL FOR MY PET?

For years the veterinary community has recommended that all cats and dogs receive vaccinations each year. Many of you may have heard that this might not always be the best practice. There are reports of dogs and cats developing vaccine reactions, autoimmune disorders, and even some cancers. On the other hand, countless dogs and cats have lived and have been prevented from developing deadly devastating diseases such as distemper and parvovirus, not to mention the potential infection to humans with viruses such as rabies. So what is a responsible pet owner to do?

Fortunately, quite a bit of research has been performed and extended vaccine protocols are now considered mainstream. Studies have shown that some vaccines are effective when given every three years after the typical puppy and kitten series. In fact the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA), the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP), and The American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine (ACVIM) have all come out in favor of generally giving core vaccinations every three years to adults. Core vaccinations are defined as rabies and the typical “distemper” vaccine. Other vaccinations such as feline leukemia, leptospirosis, and bordetella are still given annually if your pet is considered at risk for exposure. The bottom line is that vaccinations should be given based on each pet’s chance of being exposed, with a goal of limiting the number and frequency of vaccines.

Your pet’s doctor can help you determine which vaccines your pet needs. Discuss with your veterinarian the type of lifestyle your pet leads. Does he spend a lot of time in the woods? Does she go to day care every day? Does she stay inside all the time? By examining your pet’s activity an individual protocol can be developed. This should be routinely done at the time of your pet’s annual examination. This visit is crucial to the health of your pet. Since our animal friends can’t tell us when they feel sick, it is more difficult to know if something is not quite right. By asking questions, and performing a complete physical examination each year, your veterinarian can pick up subtle disease. Many times diseases can be cured or at least more successfully treated the sooner they are found.

Pet owners have found that when they don’t have to worry about all the vaccines each year they can concentrate on other preventative care. Many illnesses have been discovered when screening blood and urine tests are performed. For example, hyperthyroidism is fairly common in older cats. The typical symptoms are weight loss and increased appetite. Some cat owners may not notice a change in the beginning. They may feel that their cat has just lost that excess weight and is eating great. If your veterinarian runs a blood panel this disease could be identified earlier and treatment could begin, potentially preventing

damage to other organs such as the kidneys or heart. The same could be said for performing x-rays on your older dog when he doesn’t get up as easily, to keeping both your dog and cat on heart worm, flea and tick preventatives. By completing these preventative measures you are taking much better care of your pet.

Medicine is always changing. Three year vaccination protocols for core vaccines in dogs and cats are scientifically accepted as appropriate and correct for most pets. Your veterinarian is the most qualified to help you determine which vaccines your pet needs and how often they should be given. Let them use the all important annual examination to determine the best preventative health for your pet. This is the time to make sure that you are doing all that you can do to identify any existing disease and how can you stop or slow down conditions that are developing. Working together we can give our pets the long and happy lives that they deserve.

Gate City Animal Hospital




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