

Pets, like people, can be protected from many highly contagious and deadly diseases by vaccination.

The widespread use of vaccines within the last century has helped prevent death and disease in millions of animals. Since vaccines are generally very safe and relatively inexpensive, there's just no reason to let your pet go unprotected.



What you should know:

- **Vaccinations are important.**
Along with regular veterinary exams, they are vital steps in safeguarding your pet's health.
- **They help prevent disease.**
Today's vaccines can help protect your pet from many serious and even life-threatening diseases.
- **They can even protect you.**
Certain vaccinations, such as rabies and leptospirosis, are necessary to protect your own health in addition to that of your pet.

Q & A

Do vaccinations carry any risks?

After vaccination, some pets may develop mild soreness at the injection site or appear slightly lethargic. This is normal. If your pet develops any unusual symptoms, such as marked facial swelling, difficulty breathing or signs of extreme discomfort, contact your veterinarian immediately.

In extremely rare cases, pets can have allergic reactions to a vaccine. However, severe reactions are very rare.

The important point to remember is this: your pet's risk of experiencing a serious side effect from a vaccination is *quite low* compared to the risk of contracting a serious disease if left unvaccinated.

Very rarely, a tumor may develop in cats at an injection site (this can be from vaccine or non-vaccine injections). Contact your veterinarian promptly if any lumps develop in your cat's skin.

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Vaccinations

An easy way to shield your pet from serious diseases



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Vaccinations

Vaccinations: Stopping disease before it starts

How vaccinations work.

When your pet receives a vaccine, its immune system produces certain substances called antibodies. These work against the virus or bacteria that causes the disease.

Later, if your pet is exposed to that same disease, these antibodies will help destroy the invading virus or bacteria.

Once immunity is established, pets receive booster shots on a predetermined schedule to maintain that protection throughout their lives.

Boosters maintain the protection.

Your pet's vaccination schedule will vary based on its age, its individual risk of contracting certain diseases, and the type of vaccine used.

In general, once immunity is established, adult pets will receive vaccine boosters once every 1 to 3 years depending on the vaccine. At your pet's annual physical examinations, your veterinarian will recommend a vaccination schedule that matches your pet's individual needs and risk factors.

Which vaccines does your pet need?

Your veterinarian will advise you. The need for vaccination against certain diseases varies depending on what region of the country you live in, whether your pet lives mostly indoors or mostly out, and what kinds of activities he or she is involved in, such as shows, sporting activities, etc. There are basic vaccine requirements for all dogs and cats.

Rabies is one of the most important vaccines for dogs and cats. Rabies is a serious disease with the potential to infect humans — where it is invariably fatal after the onset of clinical signs.

Here are other vaccines that every pet should receive:

For Dogs

- **Canine Distemper:** This is an essential vaccine for dogs as the virus is widespread. For unprotected dogs, especially puppies, this disease can be fatal. However, as long as a dog is protected through a vaccination program, it is extremely unlikely that it will contract distemper.
- **Parvovirus:** This can cause acute severe gastrointestinal disease. Without aggressive treatment, puppies and young dogs are at great risk, and death occurs in some cases despite aggressive therapy.

Depending on where you live and your dog's individual risks, your veterinarian may also recommend vaccination for **Bordetella** (kennel cough complex), **leptospirosis**, and **Lyme disease**.

VCA Pet Tips:

- ① Canine distemper can develop in up to 75% of unprotected dogs. Yet vaccinations can easily shield your dog from this often-fatal disease.
- ② It can take up to six weeks for your pet to develop sufficient immunity to protect it from the disease it has been vaccinated for.

Why puppies and kittens need extra shots.

In the first few months of life, puppies and kittens must be vaccinated several times. That's because their immature immune systems cannot fight off diseases as well as when they are older.

It's very important to make sure these little ones receive the right vaccinations, in the right sequence, and at the right time in order to give them the maximum protection.

As a rule of thumb, youngsters should be vaccinated on a regular schedule, beginning at 6 to 8 weeks of age. Booster shots should be given at 10 to 12 weeks, and then again at 14 to 16 weeks. The rabies vaccine is given separately at 12 to 16 weeks.

A complete series of vaccines is given one year later, and then the individual boosters are given every 1 to 3 years as deemed necessary by your veterinarian.

Most dogs are also routinely vaccinated against **infectious canine hepatitis** and **canine parainfluenza virus**.

For Cats

- **Feline Distemper:** Also known as feline panleukopenia, this disease is most commonly seen in younger cats but can affect felines of any age. Since it's often fatal, all cats should be protected through vaccination.
- **Feline Rhinotracheitis Virus/Feline Calicivirus:** These two viruses are responsible for most of the respiratory diseases caused in cats.

Depending on where you live and your cat's individual risks, your veterinarian may also recommend vaccination for **feline leukemia**.