

*Show you care*

*Pet vaccination:  
the facts*

# *Infectious diseases once killed thousands of pets each year.*

But then we started vaccinating. Vaccination became one of the greatest success stories of veterinary medicine, saving countless lives and gaining universal acceptance. Back then, of course, few people cared how long vaccines worked - they were just grateful that they worked at all.

The world moves on. These days - thanks to vaccination - infectious disease is much less obvious; and meanwhile the MMR debate seems to have damaged the reputation of vaccines in general. Most recently, there's been some discussion in the media about pet booster vaccinations. Are they really vital to your pet's health? Or are they just a way for your vet to make money?

Below we try to answer these questions, and others, as fully and honestly as possible. We hope to allay your fears, whilst showing you the very positive steps that have been taken to address recent concerns.

## ***Should we vaccinate our pets at all?***

It's worth remembering that many of the pet diseases we vaccinate against are killers. Whereas a child with mumps will almost certainly get better, an unvaccinated dog that contracts parvovirus can easily die.

Only vaccination can prevent these diseases in animals exposed to infection. Even those who question the need for annual boosters are strongly supportive of vaccination overall.

*Show you care*



### ***But are these diseases still a threat?***

Vaccination has dramatically reduced the frequency of most of these diseases, but - unlike, say, smallpox in humans - none has been eradicated altogether.

Sadly, apart from the rabies reporting scheme, there is currently no national reporting scheme for the diseases which affect pets. In the following tables the latest known position on each of the key diseases in the UK can be found.

## Disease

## Prevalence

### ***Dogs***

<b>Parvovirus</b>	Widespread pockets
<b>Distemper</b>	Currently no significant outbreaks in the UK. Major outbreak in Finland some years ago when one vaccine failed
<b>Infectious Hepatitis</b>	Fairly uncommon in the UK, but still exists
<b>Leptospirosis</b>	Exposure to infection is relatively common. One form is carried in rat urine.
<b>Kennel cough</b>	Remains widespread in dogs, particularly those exposed to high risk environments such as boarding kennels and shows
<b>Rabies</b>	No cases in UK

## Disease

## Prevalence

### ***Cats***

<b>Viral cat 'flu</b>	Widespread
<b>Bacterial cat 'flu</b>	Widespread, caused by <i>Bordetella bronchiseptica</i> (Bb)
<b>Feline leukaemia</b>	Widespread, relatively common
<b>Panleucopenia</b>	Fairly uncommon in the UK
<b>Chlamydomphila infection</b>	Widespread, caused by <i>Chlamydomphila felis</i>

## Disease

## Prevalence

### ***Rabbits***

<b>Myxomatosis</b>	Widespread in the UK
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### ***Does a single vaccination protect my pet for life?***

Every pet responds differently. Legally, the manufacturer's authorisation to sell vaccines and the recommendations for use are based on the minimum period of protection for any animal vaccinated with the product in question.

Major studies have already been carried out to determine whether this minimum period can be extended. As each of these studies have satisfied the authorities, so the manufacturer's recommendations

## Significance



Severe disease, often fatal

Severe disease, potentially fatal

Severe disease, potentially fatal

Can be fatal in dogs, but may also be transmitted to humans, where it can cause a very serious infection called Weil's disease

Extremely unpleasant but rarely life threatening (except in the old or very young)

Required only for travel abroad

## Significance



Extremely unpleasant and highly infectious. Possibly fatal in young kittens, many infected cats will become carriers

Possibly fatal in young kittens, highly infectious and can be transmitted from dogs to cats and vice versa

Severe disease, potentially fatal

Severe disease, potentially fatal

Extremely unpleasant conjunctivitis, but rarely life threatening

## Significance



Usually fatal

have been amended.

As a result, some vaccines are now licensed to protect pets for up to three years against some diseases.

But it's vital to realise that protection is much shorter for some diseases. Especially for leptospirosis in dogs - *no vaccine will protect your pet for more than a year.*

This is a real effect, rather than the result of the licensing taking time to catch up: studies have shown that even with one of the best leptospirosis vaccines, protection starts to decline after about 12 months.

## ***Are annual boosters really necessary?***

To simplify the previous point: yes, annual boosters are still necessary against some diseases. But not all.

Each year, on your annual visit, your vet will administer only those vaccines needed to maintain protection. These days the vet's primary objective is to use the minimum number of vaccine components while at the same time maintaining the optimum protection for your pet.

## ***Do vaccinations cause more illness than they prevent?***

As with any medicinal product, whether for human or animal use, an adverse reaction is possible. But serious adverse reactions are exceptionally rare. Pet vaccines are tested thoroughly for both safety and efficacy.

Claims by an anti-vaccine group, that vaccination causes high level of illness, were recently investigated in a independent epidemiological study involving almost 4000 dogs. There was no evidence to suggest that dogs suffered any increased level of illness after vaccination. If anything, recently vaccinated dogs had less disease.

No pet owner is under any legal or other obligation to vaccinate their animals - it's something we recommend simply because it offers a significant health benefit: it protects your pet from serious illness.

## ***Are combination vaccines more likely to provoke adverse reactions than single shots?***

There is no intrinsic additional risk. Combination vaccines must be tested as *combinations* and compared to the single components in respect of both safety and efficacy. There is no evidence to suggest that our licensed combination vaccines are less safe or efficacious than single component products.

## ***Can I use homoeopathic vaccines to protect my pet instead?***

There is no legal requirement for homoeopathic vaccines (or nosodes, as they're sometimes called) to undergo efficacy or safety trials to satisfy the licensing authorities. In fact, where serious attempts have been made to prove efficacy - for example in a parvovirus challenge experiment - nosodes failed to prevent or even reduce either illness or death.<sup>1</sup>

We have no wish to disparage homoeopathy in general; but there is no evidence to suggest that homoeopathic vaccines are powerful enough to protect against infectious diseases.

### ***Summary***

- Vaccination has saved - and continues to save - the lives of thousands of pets
- Most vaccines protect against diseases that are potentially killers
- All of the diseases covered in routine vaccination are still present in the UK
- Boosters are necessary to maintain protection - just like human holiday jabs!
- There is no evidence to suggest that vaccination causes illness
- All licensed pet vaccines have undergone rigorous safety trials

1) Schultz, R, personal communication

### **More information**

We hope this leaflet will help to explain the truth about vaccination, and the complexities which surround it. But if you'd like any further information, please don't hesitate to contact your veterinary surgeon, contact Intervet at [support.uk@intervet.com](mailto:support.uk@intervet.com), or visit our website



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