



CREATURE COMFORTS
HOUSE CALL
VETERINARY SERVICE

Current Vaccine Concerns (updated Jan. 2004)

Vaccines have really become a hot topic in both human and veterinary medicine these last few years. About ten years ago, a few researchers/pathologists came forward with a hypothesis which suggested that by over-vaccinating our pets (and children) we are harming their immune system and causing disease. Over the last decade these suggestions have been further researched. Currently, at national veterinary conventions, there are always numerous presentations on vaccine concerns. Here is a summary of the information presented on vaccines in pets, at the 2003 American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Convention in Denver, C O .

First of all, the number of animal lives saved by vaccine is far greater than the number of pets with serious adverse reactions to the vaccines. **The AVMA goals are to find the safest vaccine *and* use it in the right situation *and* at the correct interval.** So, let's discuss these goals.

The safest vaccine would include one that is thimerosal free and adjuvant free, yet effective. This means that it would not contain mercury, aluminum or bacterial stimulants. Some researchers feel that these additives have serious side effects, including causing chronic illness like arthritis, allergies and auto-immune disease. Merial is a drug company that has developed an adjuvant free line of vaccines. Hopefully other vaccine manufacturers will follow suit.

Another goal is to use discretion in choosing the right vaccine for the right animal. Just because there is a vaccine for a given disease, doesn't mean that it needs to be used. If your cat doesn't go outside, then do not use Feline Leukemia vaccine. The only way that your cat can get Leukemia is by being in contact with another cat that is infected. So, vaccinating based on the animals lifestyle, rather than with every available product, is the right choice.



Lastly, how often do the vaccines really need to be given to be protective? This is where the research is still debatable. Some studies have shown that the distemper vaccine given to cats can last as long as nine years. Other studies do not support these results. However, at the last AVMA

convention, the general consensus was that the research is solid for three years of protection in both the cat and dog distemper vaccine. So, giving the distemper vaccine on an annual basis is not necessary, according to the research. It will be interesting to see where the research leads us down the road. Perhaps one day, we will only vaccinate the young animals. One caution that I would like to point out here is **true over-vaccination**. If you purchase "over-the-counter" vaccines and vaccinate your own pet (first of all the sterility and efficacy are in question) do NOT follow the vaccine

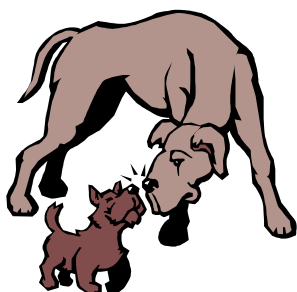
schedule on the label. Many of the vaccines that are sold "over-the-counter" instruct the breeder to vaccinate puppies and kittens at 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14 and 16 weeks of age. This is what is meant as "over-vaccinated". This is how the greatest harm is caused by the vaccine. There is no reason to.

Another hot topic, relating to vaccines, is the "titer" testing issue. A blood sample can be taken to determine your cat or dogs antibody level against the distemper or rabies virus. If the titer comes back low, then the vaccine booster is administered. There are multiple concerns with titers.



The most important, in my opinion, is that laboratories disagree on what test result number shows complete protection. In other words, what "titer value" would mean that your pet is not protected and needs to be boosted. If we don't know what the results really mean, what is the point in running the test? Of course, if your test value comes back very high, you can be confident that your pet really is protected. But, what if it comes back in the "grey zone?" Do you bring the pet back into the clinic for a booster or do you "take a chance"? The next concern is the price. Titer test cost varies between \$110-\$150 per pet per year. The cost of the vaccine is \$15-\$25. Clearly, many owners would choose the cheaper option (unfortunately). Also, if your pet's titer does come back low and needs to be boosted, this means another trip back into the clinic (or another house call fee) to have the booster administered. Lastly, a titer test requires a blood sample. Getting a blood sample from a cat on an annual basis, to run the test well, need I say more?

So, in conclusion, there is still not a clear cut answer when it comes to vaccinating our pets. We need to continue to control these terrible deadly diseases that vaccines protect us from. But, we need to use the vaccines appropriately and continue to research this issue until we find the best possible solutions. Currently the vaccine manufacturers have not changed their labels (which state that **annual** vaccination is required). It is due to this fact that many veterinarians continue to give annual vaccines. We would be going "off-label" recommendations to change the schedule. This opens up liabilities.



Our intent at Creature Comforts is to provide quality care for your pet. We feel that vaccinating every year is not necessary to protect your pet's health. The research presented at the national convention did support this conclusion. We will be following the University of Wisconsin School of Veterinary Medicine vaccination protocol.

The rules of thumb are three-fold in this program.

- 1.) Do not administer more than **one vaccine injection** (excluding Bordatella) in a given year.
- 2.) Use a **three year rotating schedule for distemper and rabies.**
- 3.) Use vaccines appropriate to animals life-style.
- 4.) Use the safest possible product.