

What To Expect: A Vaccination Appointment

This page is designed to give you a head's up on what you can expect when you take your pet in for his or her vaccination appointment. The page also discusses what you should expect from your veterinarian during a vaccination appointment. If you have any questions, please call your Shuswap veterinary care team at 250-832-6069.

Here's a basic rationale

People and animals use antibodies to fight many viral and bacterial diseases. Your puppy or kitten will have received its first dose of disease fighting antibodies in the first 24 hours of its life, through the consumption of colostrum (first milk) from its mom, provided she was properly immunized. But these antibodies will diminish within a few short weeks. After that period of time it is up to the immune system to make those antibodies in sufficient numbers and thus create immunity.

Vaccinations are given to stimulate the immune system to do exactly that. Some diseases require more immune stimulation than others to cause immunity and this is the reason why, for example, the first Rabies vaccine is good for a whole year, whereas the first Parvo or Distemper virus vaccination is only good for about 4 weeks. Currently, the general recommendation is to administer a series of three puppy at 8, 12 and 16 weeks of age with periodic booster vaccinations thereafter and for kitten vaccinations, two vaccinations at 8 and 12 weeks. .

Your veterinarian will help you work out an appropriate schedule specifically for your pet, as well as what diseases to vaccinate against. This will vary, depending on where your pet lives, its lifestyle and where it may travel to. It is important to adhere to the specified schedule to avoid the risk of loss of immunity. By helping to avoid disease, vaccination enhances your pet's quality of life. In addition, some infectious diseases, like rabies, may be transmissible to people, so vaccinating your pet also protects you and your family.

Your visit is more than simply a vaccination:

A routine vaccination appointment is a veterinary appointment where you take your pet in to receive his vaccinations and get an exam. Your veterinarian will normally examine your pet from nose to tail, examining his/her eyes, teeth, skin, lymph nodes, gums and body condition (overweight, underweight etc.). Your veterinarian will listen to your pet's heart and lungs and abdomen sounds, palpate your pet's abdomen and femoral pulses and take his/her temperature. Sometimes your veterinarian will even take your pet's blood pressure (this is highly advisable in animals over 8 years old).

If all checks out okay, then your veterinarian will give your dog or cat an injectable and/or intranasal (up the nose) vaccine. Your veterinarian may also discuss with you on basic things like worming, heartworming, flea treatments, dental disease (they may even book you in for a dental scale and polish) and diet control (especially if your pet is overweight or underweight). If your pet needs his or her nails trimmed or anal glands expressed, then this can be done during a routine vaccination too. This exam is part of the service we provide with your vaccination appointment.

When your veterinarian admits you into the consult room, your pet will be examined on either the floor or a consult table. Where possible, the table is always preferred because it allows for a much more thorough examination of your pet and, it seems to even subdue some animals (an animal that is boisterous and unmanageable on the floor will often freeze and be perfectly manageable on the table). All small to medium-sized animals are examined on a consult table.

Pets are examined on the floor is when they are very large (too large to go onto the table) or excessively anxious (some pets are more docile and comfortable on the floor).

Included in your vaccination visit, your veterinarian will examine your pet's:

gums - looking at gum color, refill time (how soon the colour returns to the gum when it is pressed) and examining for any signs of gum infection (gingivitis) or masses.

teeth - looking for teeth fractures, retained baby-teeth and signs of infection and plaque accumulation (a dental scale and polish may be needed).

eyes - looking for any sign of disease, jaundice, early cataracts etc.

skin - looking for signs of mites, fleas, allergies, ear infections (the vet should even look down the ear canals - especially in regions with lots of grass seeds), fur matting (especially in long-coated cats), lumps and hernias (e.g. umbilical hernias of pups).

nose - looking for any discharges, lumps and pigment changes.

lymph nodes - all lymph nodes should be palpated and oversized ones noted and rechecked (large nodes can be a sign of infection or inflammation somewhere or even a sign of cancer).

heart - the vet needs to check the heart for heart rate, heart arrhythmias and heart murmurs (in puppies heart murmurs can be a serious sign of congenital heart defects).

lungs - the vet needs to check the respiration rate (speed of breathing) and listen to the lungs for dull patches, wheezing (e.g. feline asthma, allergies) and crackles (fluid in the lungs).

abdomen - the vet should feel the abdomen checking for internal masses, fluid, signs of constipation, kidney size and regularity (especially in older cats), and liver size.

pulses - the strength and evenness and regularity of femoral pulses needs to be felt and compared with the heart rate (pulse rate should equal heart rate).

temperature - the dog or cat temperature should be between 37.5C and 39C (though temperatures up to 39.5C or more may be acceptable in excited dogs or dogs that have walked to the clinic). Dogs with high or low temperatures should not be vaccinated.

testicles - all male pups should have their testicles palpated during their initial puppy vaccines to ensure that both testicles descend normally and on time. Retained testicles (cryptorchidism) are a health problem and potentially hereditary.

body condition - your veterinarian will assess your dog or cat's weight and condition and let you know if your pet is too thin or overweight. Do not get offended if your doctor tells you that your pet is fat or skinny. This is part of your doctor's job and correcting the problem is essential to your furry friend's health.

So what vaccines should dogs receive?

Dogs should begin their initial puppy vaccination series at 8 weeks of age. These vaccines give immune responses in healthy pets to canine distemper, adenovirus, parainfluenza, and parvovirus and are given once monthly until the puppy is approximately 4 months old. A minimum of three vaccinations are necessary for all previously unvaccinated dogs.

Rabies vaccination is given at 12-16 weeks of age. If a dog has never had a rabies vaccination before it must be given a second vaccination within one year, and every 3 years thereafter in our province.

Bordetella vaccine protects against some forms of tracheobronchitis or canine kennel cough. It is strongly advised if your dog visits boarding facilities while you are on vacation or away, or is in dog shows, or is in any way exposed to many other dogs, and it helps prevent this frequently diagnosed disease. New information indicates that this vaccine should be given once yearly for good protection for your pet.

What vaccines should cats receive?

Cats should begin their initial kitten vaccination series at 8 weeks of age. These vaccines give immune response in healthy pets to feline panleukopenia (distemper), rhinotracheitis, calicivirus, and chlamydia and are given once monthly until the kitten is approximately 4 months old. All cats that have never been vaccinated need a minimum of two vaccinations.

Rabies vaccination is given at 12-16 weeks of age. If a cat has never had a rabies vaccination before it must be given a second vaccination within one year, and then every year thereafter in our province.

Available on request is feline leukemia vaccine is initially given to kittens (who will be going outside) 12 weeks of age or older. A second vaccination is given approximately one month later. All outdoor cats need a minimum of two vaccinations initially, followed by a yearly booster. Cats that are allowed outside at any time can be tested annually for Feline Leukemia and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus.

Whenever you have a question, please ask any of our talented veterinary care