

The Good Companions VETERINARY CLINIC

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PREVENTATIVE HEALTHCARE: VACCINATIONS

Why is vaccination important?

We routinely vaccinate to protect your dog against 5 serious infectious diseases, that can be life threatening if contracted.

What diseases do we vaccinate against?

Canine Distemper

Whilst vaccination has resulted in a decrease in the incidence of this disease in recent years, pockets of infection still exist, especially in large cities where there are many unvaccinated dogs. The main source of infection is by inhalation during close dog to dog contact; signs may take up to three weeks to appear. Dogs less than one year of age are most commonly affected.

Typically, the first signs are runny nose and eyes with coughing and vomiting, followed by unusual tiredness, lack of appetite and diarrhoea. After several weeks there may also be a thickening of the pads, and nervous signs, including twitching or even fits. Dogs that survive may develop serious nervous signs later in life.

Treatment of canine distemper is usually unsuccessful - vaccination is the best form of protection.

Infectious Canine Hepatitis

Canine Hepatitis, caused by an adenovirus which mainly attacks the liver, can rapidly be fatal. Transmission is by close dog to dog contact, and dogs recovering from the disease can spread infection for more than 6 months. Dogs are most commonly affected in the first year of life, but all ages are susceptible.

Early signs include general discomfort and lack of appetite, very high temperature, pale gums and conjunctiva, vomiting, diarrhoea and abdominal pain. The dog may later develop jaundice. In some dogs which recover, a clouding of the cornea occurs, known as 'blue eye', which usually resolves.

Canine Parvovirus

Canine Parvovirus is a small but extremely hardy virus that can survive in the environment for long periods. The disease first emerged as an epidemic in the 1970s, killing many thousands of dogs before an effective vaccine became available. Although no longer present in epidemic proportions, 'Parvo' is still relatively common in unvaccinated dogs. Primary vaccination and regular boosters are vital to protect against this disease.

The main source of infection is the faeces of infected dogs; the virus can also be spread on shoes and clothing and on the coat and pads of dogs.

An infection with canine parvovirus usually results in enteritis. It can arise in any age of dog from about four weeks of age, but most commonly in those under one year old. Signs appear quickly and usually consist of depression, severe vomiting, refusal of food and water, abdominal pain and profuse smelly, bloody diarrhoea. This can result in rapid and severe dehydration leading to death

Leptospirosis

Leptospirosis is caused by bacteria that are spread in the urine of infected animals. It can also spread to humans by contact with infected urine. Two forms of disease are seen:

Leptospira icterohaemorrhagiae (Weil's disease)

This is contracted from rats, most commonly via contact with infected urine or rat-contaminated water. Likely areas of contamination are canals and rivers.

The liver is the main organ affected, although the kidneys may be involved. Signs are usually a high temperature, severe thirst, lethargy, increased urination, abdominal pain, vomiting, bloody diarrhoea and jaundice. In very severe cases, death can occur in a few hours.

Leptospira canicola

This is contracted from the infected urine of other dogs. Milder signs are often seen, with the kidneys being the main organs affected; jaundice is seen less often and is less severe. However, damage to the kidneys may cause problems in later life. Dogs that recover can excrete the bacteria in their urine for up to a year and are thus a potential source of infection.

Parainfluenza virus

Infectious bronchitis is a contagious upper respiratory disease which usually occurs where dogs are in close contact - boarding kennels, rescue centres, shows, etc. A variety of infectious agents may be involved. These include *Bordetella bronchiseptica*, Canine Parainfluenza Virus, Canine Adenovirus, Herpesvirus and Reovirus.

Signs are usually a distressing dry cough, which may cause retching; tiredness, loss of appetite and a mildly raised temperature. Very occasionally, the disease can progress to pneumonia. Treatment is usually successful and recovery uneventful, but it may take up to three weeks.

Vaccination is possible against the common components of this syndrome and is particularly useful when dogs are to be boarded at kennels or regularly attend shows.

We can also vaccinate against **Rabies** for pets that travel on the PETS travel scheme, and **Bordetella** which is an important component of 'kennel cough' for dogs that prefer not to jet set!

When should I vaccinate my dog?

During the first weeks after birth, a puppy is protected by antibodies it received from its mother. As this protection declines, vaccination is essential to maintain immunity to disease. Contracting these diseases may cause damage that doesn't become apparent until later in life, so vaccinations should be started in puppyhood.

Puppy Vaccination: We can vaccinate puppies from 8 weeks of age, they need an initial course of vaccinations, with the 2nd vaccination 2 weeks after the first. This makes sure that your puppy has a high level of antibodies to provide protection against the infectious diseases above.

Booster Vaccinations: Your dog's immunity will start to decline with time, we therefore need to give a booster vaccination to raise your dog's immunity to a protective level. In line with the vaccine manufacturer's guidelines we recommend that your dog has a booster vaccination every year. This is also a great chance for you to have a chat with the vet about any concerns you may have and for your dog to have a full health check.

Rabies: We only vaccinate dogs against rabies if they are going to travel abroad, either to emigrate or as part of the PETs Travel Scheme. The rabies vaccination is a one off vaccine (no initial course is required) and requires boosters every 2 years.

Kennel Cough: The kennel cough vaccine is an intranasal vaccine that we give to dogs at least 5 days before they go into kennels. This vaccination requires annual boosters.

I forgot to bring my dog for a booster!

Firstly, you are not alone! If your dog's booster was due within the past 6-8 weeks then we can give the booster vaccination as normal. If you are more than 6-8 weeks overdue then we would recommend a 2nd vaccination 2 weeks later (as with the puppy course) so that we can ensure your dog has a good immunity for the rest of the year. Contact the practice to discuss your needs with one of the nurses.