

Vaccination Recommendations

Vaccines are products designed to stimulate protective immune responses in pets and prepare them to fight future infections from disease-causing agents. They can lessen the severity of future diseases and certain vaccines can prevent infection altogether. Today, a variety of vaccines are available for use by veterinarians.

Pets should be vaccinated to protect them from many highly contagious and deadly diseases. In some cases (rabies, for example), vaccinating your pet can also protect you from disease. If an unvaccinated pet develops one of these diseases, treatment can become very expensive and many of these diseases can be fatal, even if your pet received prompt and appropriate treatment. Rabies vaccination for dogs is required by law in Wisconsin.

Not all pets should be vaccinated with all available vaccines. “Core” vaccines are recommended for most pets in a particular area because they protect from diseases most common in that area. “Non-core” vaccines are reserved for individual pets with unique needs. Your veterinarian will consider your pet’s risk of exposure to a variety of preventable diseases in order to customize a vaccination program for optimal protection throughout your pet’s life. Talk with your veterinarian about your pet’s lifestyle including its expected travel to other geographic locations and/or contact with other animals (such as exposure at kennels, obedience classes, shows, and dog parks) since these factors impact your pet’s risk of exposure to certain diseases. For older pets, make sure your veterinarian is aware of any previous adverse reactions to vaccines.

There are risks associated with vaccination, but they are usually outweighed by the benefits. The most common adverse responses are mild and short-term, including fever, sluggishness and reduced appetite. Pets may also experience temporary pain or subtle swelling at the site of vaccination. Although most adverse reactions will resolve within a day or two, any excessive or continued pain, swelling, or listlessness should be discussed with your veterinarian. Rarely, more serious adverse reactions can occur. Allergic reactions appear within minutes or hours of a vaccination and may include repeated vomiting or diarrhea, whole body itching, swelling of the face or legs, difficulty breathing, or collapse. Contact your veterinarian immediately if any of these symptoms are seen. In very rare instances, death could occur from an allergic reaction. There are other uncommon but serious adverse reactions, including injection site tumors (sarcomas) in cats, which can develop weeks or months after a vaccination. The best advice is to always tell your veterinarian about any abnormalities you notice after your pet has been vaccinated.