

Why Vaccinate?

Vaccinations aim to protect your dog from potentially fatal diseases. Vaccinations should start when a puppy is 6 weeks old, then again at 10-12 weeks and finally at 16 weeks of age. An annual booster is then recommended to keep your dog immune. Diseases which we vaccinate against are Canine Parvovirus (Parvo), Canine Distemper, Canine Hepatitis and Canine/ kennel cough.

Canine parvovirus is a lethal disease which can cause death within 24 hours. Symptoms of Parvo are a high temperature, blood in faeces and vomiting. A dog with Parvo, if left untreated will die. Parvo is an extremely resistant virus and will live in any environment for years.

Canine Distemper is not common in the suburbs, but is more prevalent in the bush. It is usually a fatal disease that causes respiratory, gastrointestinal and nervous system problems. It is a highly contagious disease that affects dogs of any ages. Young puppies are at highest risk. Symptoms include coughing, sneezing, nasal discharge, vomiting, diarrhoea, loss of appetite and depression. Muscle tremors, fits and paralysis occur further on in the disease. The recovery rate for distemper is very low and the dog will die very quickly.

Canine hepatitis is also very contagious and lethal. Dogs under two years of age are at highest risk. Canine hepatitis is a viral disease of the liver. Symptoms include high fever, depression, loss of appetite, vomiting, diarrhoea and acute abdominal pain. Death can occur within 36 hours in severe cases. If the dog does recover it may have long term liver and kidney damage.

Canine / Kennel cough is highly contagious and can spread wherever dogs congregate, i.e. the park, dog shows, boarding kennels and obedience schools. Symptoms include a rough cough that can finish with a gagging and will last for several weeks. If left untreated it can lead to pneumonia.

A vaccination stimulates the dogs immune system to protect itself from the disease. When vaccinating a small portion of the disease is injected in to the dog. The dogs immune system will build a response against the disease to destroy it. Some dogs have a negative response and will feel a bit off colour for a couple of days. This reactions more common in small dogs and will cause the dog to eat less and sleep more for the 24-48 hours following a vaccination. Dogs can have a worse reaction to vaccination although this is very rare. Veterinarians will tell you that it is more important to have your dog protected against potentially lethal diseases than to be concerned about minimal risks involved.

Vaccines are not 100% protection against the diseases. Cases have been known when a dog will contract the disease anyway. This can occur when something stops the dog producing antibodies against the disease. This could be fever, steroids, disease and maternal antibodies. Timing is also very important when giving vaccines. If given too close together the vaccines can be blocked by the earlier shot and if too far apart the immune system's memory response will not be effective.

For more information and advice, dog owners should consult their vet.