

# Elburn Animal Hospital Newsletter

August, 2009

## Welcome

August is Immunization Awareness Month. In this issue we are focusing on vaccinations: those we use, those we do not, and why; vaccine protocols for various stages of life in our companion animals; and situations in which we do *not* recommend vaccinations. Any questions can be addressed to a member of our staff at (630) 365-9599, or you can contact us via email at [3lburn@sbcglobal.net](mailto:3lburn@sbcglobal.net).

## August: Immunization Awareness:

In today's economy, more pet owners are opting to vaccinate only against rabies, because it is the only state-required vaccination for dogs, cats and ferrets. But doing this leaves your pets (even indoor-only ones) open to potentially lethal diseases. Keeping unvaccinated pets can even cause harm to humans, especially the young, old or immune-suppressed. At Elburn Animal Hospital, we assess the risk factors for each pet on an

individual basis and vaccinate for only those diseases the animal is at risk of contracting. Below you will find an explanation for those vaccinations we recommend for every pet, as well as those we recommend only for those pets at risk.



## What Everybody Needs: The Rabies Vaccine

- The Rabies Vaccine: This vaccine is not only recommended, it is required by state law for all dogs, cats and ferrets, although all mammals can carry and transmit the disease. It poses a severe health risk not only to our pets, but to humans as well. This is because the virus is easily transmitted to humans, and is nearly always fatal, especially once symptoms appear. Symptoms can take a couple of weeks to several months to begin. The virus causes brain tissue to swell, with symptoms such as lethargy, neurologic disturbance, balance problems, the inability to



swallow liquids, combined with intense thirst and fear of liquids. It is transmitted through any break in the skin that comes in contact with the body fluids, especially the saliva, of an infected animal. Outdoor pets are not the only ones at risk. Indoor cats and ferrets are at an increased risk, because of the incidence of bats living in the attics and unused spaces of people's homes. In fact, in the past several years more indoor cats were diagnosed with rabies than outdoor dogs or cats. If an animal, even one up-to-date with its rabies vaccination, bites a human it must undergo a period of "rabies observation." Unvaccinated animals with a known exposure to an unvaccinated or wild animal must be euthanized and a sample of brain tissue sent in for testing by the state. If a human has contact with an at-risk animal, such as a feral animal, skunk or raccoon that bites, or any contact whatsoever with a bat, the Health Department recommends immediate prophylactic vaccination, consisting of several shots over a period of one month. Prophylaxis is recommended immediately whether or not the animal in question is available for testing. This virus is considered untreatable once it enters the peripheral nervous system, even if there are no symptoms apparent, so fast action is required in the event of a possible exposure. Fortunately, due to the efficacy of and stringent protocols regarding vaccinating our pets and livestock, the disease claims only 1 or 2 people each year, on average, in the United States. Still, there are several hundred cases of rabies reported in domestic animals each year, and thousands reported in wild animals.



## Recommended Canine Vaccines

- The Distemper Combo Vaccine: After the rabies vaccine, this is easily the most important vaccine to give. It is a combination vaccine, meaning one shot conveys protection from several diseases. This vaccine protects against canine distemper, adenovirus type 2, parvovirus, parainfluenza, leptospirosis, and coronavirus. These diseases are extremely contagious among dogs, and many times are lethal. Symptoms range from eye discharge, coughing, and pneumonia to violent, bloody diarrhea, jaundice, encephalitis and seizures. Many of these diseases carry a mortality rate of up to 90%. All are spread via contact with

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various body fluids, and can remain in contaminated soil for months, or even years. Although the potential for human illness is low from these diseases, due to the high incidence of morbidity in dogs, we recommend using this vaccine regularly, especially in puppies.

- The Lyme Disease Vaccine: This is a canine vaccination that is recommended for dogs that spend much time outdoors, or that travel often. Lyme disease



is caused by a type of bacteria that is transmitted when an animal is bitten by certain species of ticks. Symptoms include lethargy, anorexia, fever, lameness, kidney issues and occasionally neurologic problems. These problems may appear months after the dog is initially infected. Illinois has one of the highest rates of Lyme disease infection in canines (1000+ per year), so if your dog is outside in tall grasses or wooded areas, we recommend giving this vaccine yearly. This disease is so prevalent, in fact, that even if your dog is not "at risk," we still recommend using a flea and tick preventive product to help keep ticks from attaching to your pet.

U.S. CANINE POSITIVE LYME RESULTS\*



- The Kennel Cough Vaccine: This is a canine vaccine also called "Bordetella." It is usually caused by a combination of bacteria and viral factors, including parainfluenza, adenovirus type 2, and the bacterium *Bordetella bronchiseptica*. The disease complex is transmitted through contact with other dogs' respiratory secretions, and is considered highly contagious. Although this disease complex is not often fatal, it can cause permanent damage to the lungs and trachea, contributing to breathing and heart problems throughout life. Symptoms most often include a deep, dry cough, fever, anorexia, lethargy and depression. These can continue to pneumonia and death if untreated. We recommend vaccinating your dog against this disease if he/she comes into contact with areas of high canine traffic, such as dog parks, groomers, boarding kennels, or dog shows.

## Recommended Feline Vaccines

- The Distemper Combo Vaccine: Like the canine distemper vaccine, this is a combination vaccine

for cats. In cats, the vaccine protects against feline rhinotracheitis, calicivirus, panleukopenia and chlamydia psittaci. Most of these viruses cause symptoms of the respiratory tract, although panleukopenia (often called 'feline distemper') produces intestinal and neurologic symptoms more often. Panleukopenia is easily the most deadly of these viruses in cats, but all are highly contagious and may cause issues throughout the lives of unvaccinated companion cats. None of these viruses have much potential to spread to humans, but we recommend all companion cats and ferrets be vaccinated with the distemper vaccine for their own safety.

- The Feline Leukemia Vaccine: This vaccine is recommended for cats that spend time outdoors, or live in a household with cats that spend time outdoors. The vaccine protects against feline leukemia, often abbreviated FeLV. It is a retrovirus, similar in action to HIV, and can affect all systems in a cat. It is the most common cause of cancer in cats, it can cause various blood disorders, and it is involved in a general immune deficiency that allows normal, non-pathogenic organisms to cause disease in an affected feline. Although there are usually no signs signifying a recent infection, eventually the cat will experience a decline in general health, which can evince itself in anorexia, weight loss and muscle wasting, fever, gingivitis, pale mucus membranes, recurrent infections of



the skin, urinary system, and respiratory system, diarrhea, and seizures. Although this disease is still considered fatal, being diagnosed with feline leukemia is not necessarily the 'death sentence' it once was. With proper care and attention, a feline leukemia positive cat may live for several years. Even so, if your cat is at risk due to his lifestyle, consider adding this vaccine to his regular regimen. We have a vaccination that incorporates the feline leukemia vaccine into the feline distemper combination.

## What We Do Not Use

There are several vaccines available that we do not incorporate into our practice. These include the canine adenovirus type 1, feline infectious

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peritonitis (FIP), feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV), giardia, periodontitis, and rattlesnake venom vaccinations. It has been well-documented that canine adenovirus type 2 offers protection against the canine adenovirus type 1 virus. The FIP and FIV vaccinations are not wholly reliable and cause false positive tests from blood samples. The giardia vaccine does not offer protection from the parasite, but only stops the animal shedding it in its feces. Both the periodontitis and rattlesnake venom vaccines are extremely new, so we prefer to not utilize them until they are better proven (not to mention we don't have diamondback rattlesnakes in the area). All of these vaccines are listed as "not recommended" by the CDC.

## Vaccine Protocols

Dogs, cats and ferrets have very similar vaccination protocols.

- The first rabies vaccine is given, per state guidelines, at 16 weeks of age. Every year thereafter, the pet should be revaccinated against rabies. There is also a rabies vaccine licensed for



use every three years, should a pet owner elect to use it. The 3-year vaccine may be given at the first annual visit after the initial "puppy"

vaccines. The CDC lists that there are no adverse effects to using this 3-year duration vaccine. Many veterinarians endorse this vaccine, citing a lesser chance of an allergic reaction to the vaccine as well as lower incidence of vaccine-related tumors. Ferrets are required to be vaccinated every year using the 3-year vaccine.

- The distemper vaccine is given as early as 6 weeks of age by some breeders. This is followed



by a series of distemper vaccinations given at a veterinary office at 8, 12 and 16 weeks of age. One year following, the pet should be revaccinated using a one-year

distemper combination product. Following that, the vaccine can either be given yearly or a product licensed for revaccination every 3 years may be used. If the 3-year vaccine is used in dogs, it is recommended to include a yearly Leptospirosis vaccine. This component, found in the one-year vaccine, has not been proven to last more than one year post-vaccination, and so

should be given yearly. The feline distemper combination vaccine is also available in a 3-year product, but the feline leukemia component is not.

- The feline leukemia vaccine is given at 12 weeks, boosted four weeks later, then once yearly thereafter in at-risk pets. The cat should have a blood test to ensure it does not already have the disease before receiving this vaccination.
- The vaccine for Lyme disease is given to dogs at risk first at 12 weeks, reboosted at 16 weeks, then given once annually.
- The vaccine for kennel cough, or Bordetella, is given to at-risk pets as early as 8 weeks of age. After the initial dose, pets are revaccinated every 6 to 12 months, depending on their risk level. Dogs that are routinely exposed to other canines, in dog parks, groomers, training areas, dog shows or boarding kennels generally receive the vaccine twice yearly, and dogs that are not regularly exposed, but still have some risk factors, are vaccinated once each year.

## When We Do Not Recommend Vaccinations

Although vaccines have been proven, time and again, to do more good than harm for our furry friends, there are a few situations in which we do not recommend vaccinating our pets.

- Vaccine reactions: When a pet experiences a reaction to vaccines, there are several steps we take before recommending not to use them at all. First, certain vaccines, or components of the combination vaccines, are more likely to cause a reaction than others. In dogs, the leptospirosis component of the distemper combo is the first component we eliminate. Often we recommend using the 3-year versions of the common vaccinations, and spreading the vaccines out over the course of two or more visits. If a pet experiences a reaction to the rabies vaccine, we recommend using the 3-year version of the vaccination and using an antihistamine as a pre-medication.
- Illness and Injury: Every time an animal is vaccinated, its immune system is challenged. If a pet's immune system is already compromised, by illness or injury, we do not give vaccinations. Instead, we will work to correct the underlying



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problem and ensure our patients are healthy before vaccinating.

- Chronic Disease: Some diseases are managed



rather than cured. Severe allergic conditions, renal failure and congestive heart failure are all conditions in which we may elect not to vaccinate an animal. Instead, we often recommend

sending in blood titers to determine if the level of protection afforded by previous vaccinations is still high enough to warrant skipping a vaccine. Unfortunately, rabies titers, although available, are not usually practical cost-wise. If a pet has a serious condition that weakens its immune system for a long enough period of time, we may recommend requesting an exemption from the state required rabies vaccine.

In our September newsletter we will discuss Senior healthcare. Companion animals are living much longer nowadays. Unfortunately, this means they experience more chronic illnesses associated with aging. We will cover the most common senior ailments, including recognition of symptoms, diagnosis, and treatments available. If you have any questions or concerns, or would like more information, visit our website at [www.elburnanimalhospital.com](http://www.elburnanimalhospital.com), or give us a call at (630) 365-9599. If you would like to opt out of receiving our newsletter, please send an email to us at [3lburn@sbcglobal.net](mailto:3lburn@sbcglobal.net).

**August Special:** Get 10% off all vaccinations all this month. Make sure you mention this ad to get the discount! ☺

**Upcoming Events:** Keep thinking about your pet's costume for our **October Open House!** We are hosting another open house at our office, on Saturday, October 24<sup>th</sup>. Last year we had prizes for best costume, best family theme costumes, and a look-alike contest.

We are currently scheduling an adoption event in conjunction with our open house. Several shelter groups plan to attend, and we anticipate dogs, cats, ferrets, rabbits and maybe some other small animals! Join us for this event and get to know a little about adopting, or just visit with the pets!

Do you have an idea for a newsletter? A question you'd like answered about caring for your pet? Email us at [3lburn@sbcglobal.net](mailto:3lburn@sbcglobal.net) and let us know! We are always interested in what you have to say, and what you want to know.