Infectious Diseases of Dogs and Cats and their prevention

Good Pet Health Begins with Prevention

One of your veterinarian’s primary goals is to keep your pet from contracting an infectious disease that is preventable by vaccination. When bringing a pet into your home, you may be told your pet has had all the required vaccinations. Don’t assume that your new pet is adequately protected. It is important to find out which vaccinations have been given and when.

Next consult with your veterinarian to determine the protection status of your pet and set up an appropriate vaccination schedule. Generally, there are three to five vaccination appointments required for optimal initial preventative care for a young pet depending on age and species.

Recommended vaccinations for dogs include:
- Parvovirus, distemper, hepatitis, and rabies.
Other vaccinations that may be recommended for your dog under certain circumstances include leptospirosis, coronavirus, and tracheobronchitis.

Recommended vaccinations for cats include:
- Upper respiratory diseases, panleukopenia and rabies.
Other vaccines that may be advised for some cats include feline leukemia and feline infectious peritonitis.

All of these life-threatening diseases of pets are preventable by vaccination. Your veterinarian is ready to advise you and serve your animal’s health care needs. The Washington State Veterinary Medical Association and its members remind you that healthy pets enjoy enhanced longevity and well being. See that your companion animals are kept up to date on their vaccinations.

This pamphlet is provided by the Washington State Veterinary Medical Association and your family veterinarian. www.wsvma.org
Canine Coronavirus

Canine coronavirus affects the stomach and intestines. Vomiting, diarrhea, and depression are the usual signs. In most instances the disease is mild and self-limiting, although young puppies may become more ill. Transmission is through the stool and vomit.

Canine Distemper

Canine distemper is a severe, highly contagious viral disease of dogs including coyotes and other animals such as raccoons, skunks, seals, and ferrets. Dogs of all ages are susceptible, but the young puppy is especially vulnerable. Direct contact is not necessary for transmission since the virus can be airborne. Early signs may include a discharge from the eyes and/or nose, listlessness, and a cough. Other signs include vomiting, diarrhea, pneumonia, and convulsions. If convulsions occur, death often follows. Early treatment will help minimize permanent disease complications.

Distemper is a disease veterinarians see less often today because of vaccination programs. But the potential is always present because of unvaccinated dogs and transmission from wildlife.

Canine Hepatitis

Canine hepatitis is caused by a virus that damages the liver and respiratory tract. This disease may appear mild with loss of appetite and lethargy. In some cases these signs are accompanied by vomiting and abdominal pain, or in more severe cases, the dog may collapse and die after a brief illness.

Canine Parvovirus

Canine Parvovirus disease (CPV) is commonly known as “Parvo.” The disease can affect dogs of any age, but the very young and some older dogs are at high risk. Due to the severity of this disease, it is extremely important to consult with a veterinarian to insure that your pet is adequately protected. Wild dogs, unvaccinated dogs, and coyotes can carry this disease into your area. CPV infection is spread by dog-to-dog contact and has been diagnosed wherever dogs congregate. Parvovirus is transmitted through the stool. The virus can remain in contaminated soil for many months. It can also be transmitted on contaminated clothing, grooming items, and shoes. A diluted chlorine bleach solution, 1 part chlorine bleach to 30 parts water, kills the virus in the environment.

The first signs of illness include listlessness, lack of appetite, vomiting, and bloody diarrhea. Dehydration is severe and life threatening. This disease is critical, so at the first signs contact your veterinarian for diagnosis and treatment.

Canine Tracheobronchitis Complex

Commonly called “kennel cough,” this disease can be caused by many different bacterial or viral agents. These are highly contagious, airborne microorganisms and can cause mild to severe inflammation of the windpipe and lungs.

The most characteristic sign is a harsh, dry, hacking cough, sounding as though a bone is stuck in the dog’s throat. On occasion, pneumonia may follow from secondary bacterial complications. Since the disease is so easily spread, it is common to see tracheobronchitis go dog to dog throughout a neighborhood or kennel.

Canine Leptospirosis

Canine Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease that can be found in many animals including dogs, cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, and wildlife such as rats, deer, elk, and seals. Most transmission is through urine contaminated water sources.

Signs of the disease include vomiting, muscular stiffness and internal bleeding. Leptospirosis causes severe kidney disease. It is important that all dogs that hunt, retrieve, visit the back-country, or live in rural areas be vaccinated. Dogs that recover may become carriers and shed the bacteria in their urine. This is a disease that can be transmitted from animals to humans, so prevention is imperative.

Feline Peritonitis

While there is no treatment or cure for FIP, some vaccines are available. It is best to ask your veterinarian about FIP and whether your cat is at risk.

Feline Leukemia

Feline leukemia virus is the cause of one of the most common fatal infectious diseases of cats. The virus attacks many systems. Immune suppression leads to other illnesses such as chronic upper respiratory diseases, wound abscesses that won’t heal, cats in generalized failing health, anemia, cancer, death of newborns, and kittens that don’t thrive and then die.

Transmission of the virus is through urine and saliva. Common litter areas and food dishes can serve as sources of infection. The most common route of infection is through cat bites.

Test for feline leukemia are available. If your cat tests positive for the virus, your veterinarian is the best source of information for its care and treatment.

Feline Upper Respiratory Diseases

Feline Rhinotracheitis, Chlamydia, and Calici virus are responsible for most of the upper respiratory infections seen in cats. The microorganisms are airborne after cats sneeze and spray contaminated secretions. Signs include sneezing, discharges from the eyes and nose, and difficulty eating and drinking. Pneumonia and death can follow.

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Feline Panleukopenia

Panleukopenia refers to the generalized decrease of white blood cells in your cat’s bloodstream. This virus is widespread and exposure is common. Raccoons in your area can carry the virus. All ages of cats are susceptible with kittens being the most vulnerable. Deaths rates can be as high as 90 to 100 percent. Clinical signs include fever, loss of appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, depression, and dehydration. Vaccination is highly effective for prevention.