

Damory Veterinary
Clinic

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Small Animal Factsheet



VACCINATING YOUR DOG AND CAT

Dogs

Currently vaccination is carried out against Parvovirus, Distemper, Infectious Canine Hepatitis every 3 years and Leptospirosis and Parainfluenza every year. Kennel cough vaccination is also available as an optional extra annual vaccination. This is recommended for dogs which enter high risk situations such as kennels and shows and also when there are local outbreaks. Primary vaccinations are carried out at 8 weeks and 12 weeks of age.

Distemper and Infectious Canine Hepatitis are now, thankfully, extremely rare in the UK, although isolated cases are still reported. The success of reducing the frequency of these diseases is entirely down to vaccination. However in areas of poor vaccine uptake, cases of these diseases are still seen and they are invariably fatal.

Parvovirus is a severe form of gastroenteritis leading to profuse bleeding from the intestines. It is more common in young dogs and is often fatal. Those that survive will require intensive treatment. This condition is still relatively prevalent. Although far fewer cases are seen than was once the case we have, nevertheless, seen several cases at the practice over the last few years.

Leptospirosis is a serious bacterial infection affecting the liver, kidneys and causing anaemia. The vaccine against this is not as efficient as other vaccines so must be given more frequently (yearly). The main hosts for this disease are rats so contact with rat's urine is seen as the most likely source of infection. The disease is treatable if caught early enough but many dogs present so acutely that they are beyond help by the time treatment is instituted.

Kennel Cough is seen very commonly and is often seen as outbreaks with the disease being extremely contagious between dogs. There is a bacterial form of kennel cough caused by bordatella and a viral form caused by parainfluenza virus. Most kennels will insist on kennel cough vaccination having been given and **most kennels will insist that this has been done at least 3 weeks before going into the kennels.** The booster lasts for 1 year.

Cats

Cats are currently routinely vaccinated against Cat flu (herpes virus and calicivirus), Feline Enteritis (panleucopaenia) and Feline Leukaemia Virus. All these vaccines are carried out annually except feline enteritis which is carried out every 3 years. Primary vaccinations are carried out at 8-9 weeks and 12 weeks of age.

Cat flu is caused mainly by either herpes virus, calicivirus or both although sometimes other viruses and bacteria may contribute to the symptoms seen. The problem is most commonly seen in kittens and can be fatal in the most severe cases. Much of the problem lies in the chronic effects of contracting these viruses. Calicivirus may cause chronic gum disease but the main concern is herpes virus which stays in the body and reactivates especially at times of stress, in a similar way to cold sores in people.

Herpes virus is the commonest cause of recurrent conjunctivitis in cats and is also a cause of chronic recurrent sneezing (rhinitis). If a cat has previously suffered from cat flu it is still considered worthwhile vaccinating to try to maintain good immunity and prevent recurrences.

Feline Enteritis is caused by a virus similar to parvovirus in dogs. It can cause brain damage in kittens as well as severe, often fatal, diarrhoea. Thankfully, vaccination has largely brought the condition under control and confirmed cases are now quite rare. Thus the vaccination is now given only every 3 years.

Feline Leukaemia Virus is blood-borne and therefore is much more commonly seen in cats that fight (especially stray Toms). If cats are to be kept indoors or are in a confined garden then there is little need to vaccinate against this. The virus itself, when contracted, may only cause mild fever and may go un-noticed but it has many chronic effects predisposing cats to various types of cancers, anaemia and immune problems. Anaemia and immune problems may also arise secondary to **FIV** (feline immunodeficiency virus). This disease is also blood borne but there is currently no vaccination available to protect against this disease.

A vaccine is also available against **Chlamydia**, another cause of conjunctivitis. In view of the relatively easily treatable nature of this condition we do not include this in our core vaccines.

Concerns re Overvaccination?

As vets we are regularly asked as to whether vaccinations are necessary. This has come about due to the decreased incidence of many diseases as a result of vaccination but also due to health concerns about over-vaccination.

Whilst it is right to question the frequency of vaccination there is no doubt that there is a genuine need for vaccination as a concept and it is our belief that alternatives such as homeopathic nosodes are of little, if no benefit. The vaccination company that we use (Nobivac) has a good reputation for decreasing the frequency of vaccination where the evidence shows that we can do so safely. We, as vets, are also guided by independent bodies such as the British Small Animal Veterinary Association.

Nobivac recently carried out a large, nationwide study of the development of diseases such as epilepsy and skin problems between the vaccinated and unvaccinated populations. There was no statistical difference in the development of chronic medical conditions between the vaccinated and unvaccinated population, suggesting that vaccination should not be implicated as a trigger factor for these diseases.

That is not to say that vaccination cannot have side effects. Individual animals may react badly to an individual vaccine and its use again would have to be carefully considered. There is one known and well-recognised condition that cats get on the back of their necks. This is an injection-site sarcoma, a type of tumour, which appears to be related to repeated injections (vaccinations or other) at this site. If we suspect this we would offer prompt surgical intervention.

On the whole, however, we believe that the benefits of vaccination far outweigh the risks. If you have any specific concerns, however, one of the vets will gladly discuss this further with you in a consultation.