

Talking about Vaccinations

More than 90% of dogs in South Africa are considered non-vaccinated or inappropriately vaccinated



DR LARRY VAN NIEKERK

Dr Larry van Niekerk is a veterinary specialist surgeon, veterinary business consultant and speaker. He is founder and Chairman of the Institute for Veterinary Practice Development.

Q *My vet told me that after about eight years, dogs no longer need vaccinations. Some people believe that vaccinating your dog as a puppy and then not again (aside from the Rabies vaccination) is more than enough cover against all diseases, and annual vaccinations can contribute to shortening their lifespan. I'm really interested to know if this is correct and true.*

Dawn Austen – Regents Park, Johannesburg

A You will hopefully decide (with your own veterinarian's examination and input) that the standard of care you have chosen is acceptable to you. During an annual health check, each patient is

examined and a recommendation made based on the risk of exposure to infectious disease. Taking full responsibility as a pet owner for basic and preventive health care needs is your duty as a pet owner.

An animal's resistance and exposure to changing disease pressure must be regularly monitored throughout its life.

Your question as to whether a pet's life can be shortened by vaccination was answered back in 2004 by the POOCH study, available online, which demonstrates that recent vaccination (<3 months) does not increase signs of ill health more than 0.5% and may actually improve health by as much as 5%.

Neglect Equals Cruelty!

Preventive Health Care versus Reactive Health Care

Vaccines in human and animal medicine have been developed for two major reasons –

- To reduce the severity of clinical signs of disease
- To increase the chance of survival when contracting a disease

Vaccines are not designed to prevent an animal or person from contracting a disease, but to offer resistance should the disease be contracted.

Historically, annual vaccination was recommended as the manufacturers were only able to substantiate immunity for one year for the core diseases. Vaccines have now improved and the immunity lasts for three years, but only for Rabies, Canine Hepatitis, the Canine Parvo virus and Canine Hepatitis. It does not apply to Canine Parainfluenza, Bordetella bronchiseptica, Leptospirosis and Canine Herpes.

More than 90% of dogs in South Africa are considered non-vaccinated or inappropriately vaccinated, which creates a very high infection pressure on those not vaccinated, and leaves only 10% of dogs with some form of protection against these diseases.

Our situation cannot be compared to developed countries as outbreaks and challenges will always occur, especially in areas surrounding non-vaccinated dog populations.

Annual revaccination is recommended for active/travelling/working pets in South Africa, as the risk of disease exposure remains high.



ALWAYS TAKE YOUR VET'S ADVICE

Vaccination should be discussed with your veterinarian at the time of your pet's annual health check-up.

Annual health checks are also very important in early detection of heart disease, kidney disease, tumours, management of skin disease and many other conditions.

Core vaccines are indicated for all pets and your veterinarian will recommend non-core vaccines based on your pet's lifestyle, concurrent diseases and geographic region.

As a pet owner it is your responsibility to budget for preventive health care, which is far more affordable and less heart-breaking than a reactive approach and unduly exposing your pet to suffering and yourself to huge expense in treating disease.

WHAT DISEASES SHOULD WE VACCINATE AGAINST IN DOGS?

- All puppies should receive a 4-in-1 core vaccine, starting at 6-8 weeks of age and repeated every 3-4 weeks until 4 months old.
- Adult dogs not previously vaccinated as puppies must receive a 4-in-1 core vaccine twice, three or four weeks apart.
- Dogs must be vaccinated against Rabies by 4 months of age and receive a booster on an annual or tri-annual basis as advised by your veterinarian.

We all know that prevention is better than cure – so why question annual health checks for a companion animal that is a member of the family? 🐾

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