

# The Importance of Vaccinations and Annual Health Checks

By FAR the best protection and prevention against infectious diseases in your pet is their annual vaccinations.



It's easy to forget that sadly our pets cannot talk, they can't tell us what they are feeling, or if something is troubling them.

For this reason alone, it is so important that your furry loved ones have their biannual check-ups for seniors, annual check-ups for non-seniors and keep up to date with their vaccinations.

At the time of vaccination an annual health check is performed which includes an 18-point physical examination.

As much as we'd like to, we just can't see what's going on inside an animal's body, this is why blood and urine tests are needed to complete the whole picture of the animal's well-being.

We recommend blood and urine tests at all ages. However, the older a pet is, the more important these tests become.

### Pets are the 'Great Pretenders'

Dogs, and cats in particular, are known to hide their illnesses as a survival technique so they don't seem weak and vulnerable.

As an example – did you know that over 60% of cats over the age of 8 years have significant osteoarthritis!!

An Annual Health Check is the most reliable way to discover the early stages of any illnesses or disabilities.

Vaccinations are a preventative measure to protect your loved one from a range of diseases such as, Parvovirus, Distemper, Hepatitis, Parainfluenza, Bordetella. Leptospirosis in dogs and many more.

For cats we are talking about Feline Aids, Feline Enteritis and various types of Cat Flu.

### Is your pet fully up-to-date with (external and internal) parasite protection?

Did you know that over the past year there has been a Heartworm outbreak in Australia, including many cases in the Illawarra as well as in the Wollondilly

**This is why complete parasite protection is vital**, including heartworm preventative if your pet travels North of Wilton or to the coast.

These preventative vaccinations and heartworm prevention could lead to substantial cost saving when compared to the financial outlay required to treat your pet for the actual disease.

But most importantly vaccines and regular preventative care / strategies will help ensure your pet lives a happy, longer and healthier life.

### **Remember prevention is better than cure.**

The most prominent positives from vaccinations is the prevention of disease, death and death from illness.

Knowing your cat or dog is fully vaccinated enables you to socialize your pet worry free without having to consider catching an illness - although it is important to note that your pet doesn't necessarily need to come into contact with another dog or cat to catch some of the viruses.

Many of the viruses live in the environment. For example, Heartworm, which is transmitted via mosquitoes and Canine Kennel Cough which can be transmitted for many kilometres on the wind and air currents.

Remember your pet will not be accepted for boarding, day-care or grooming if s/he is not up to date with its vaccinations.

### **How often should my dog or cat be vaccinated?**

#### **Dogs**

Your dog should be vaccinated yearly, unless they are a puppy.

Typically, the first puppy vaccination is given at 6-8 weeks. The vaccinations occur monthly, resulting in a total of 3 vaccines, with their last vaccination occurring around the 14–16-week mark.

For adult dogs, they receive an annual C5 vaccination, which prevents against 5 potentially fatal diseases: Parvovirus, Distemper, Hepatitis, Parainfluenza and Bordetella.

Parainfluenza and Bordetella can both lead to Kennel Cough.

In certain areas of the Wingecarribee, we are now seeing a mouse and rat transmitted (potentially fatal disease) called Leptospirosis.

If you, like many of us, are in a rat / mouse plaque area, then this vaccination is essential for you dog!

If a dog misses their yearly vaccines, then to get them back 'up-to-date', they will need an extra booster a month later, leading to even more costs.

If you keep up with your dog's vaccination this will lead to cost savings, compared to if you had to pay for an extra shot if you missed a previous yearly booster.

#### **Cats**

Similar to dogs, your cat should be vaccinated yearly unless they are a kitten.

The 'normal' protocol for vaccinations starts at the age of 6-8 weeks. The two main vaccines for felines is the F3 vaccination and the FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency or Feline Aids Virus) for cats who go outside or roam.

The kitten FIV vaccination course includes 3 injections and 2 for F3 vaccinations.

- The FIV vaccine starts at weeks 6-8, occurring every 2 weeks for 3 doses.
- For the F3 vaccines, this begins at 6-8 weeks, and then one in a month to occur at the same time of the final FIV vaccination.

Every cat will have an annual booster of F3 and FIV. F3 vaccination protects against Feline Herpes Virus, Feline Calicivirus and Feline Panleukopaenia. The FIV vaccination prevents against Feline Aids.

FIV is a potentially fatal viral disease that weakens the immune system of a feline. FIV is the Feline equivalent to human AIDS. Like human AIDS, there is no cure or treatment. The only way to help prevent this awful disease is with the vaccine which aids in prevention of the infection of FIV.

FIV is a common virus in stray and outdoor cats and these cats are at a higher risk of contracting this disease. It is transmitted through fighting and bite wounds, with an infected cat biting a healthy cat, the virus being spread via saliva.

Cats infected with FIV may stay healthy for a number of years, while other infected cats show no signs of the disease at all.

This is why prevention is so important.

Some infected cats may show signs of fever, loss of appetite and diarrhoea.

As the disease becomes more severe, symptoms such as weight loss, poor coat and sores in and around the mouth may become prevalent. Sadly, the immune system eventually becomes too weak to fight off other viruses or diseases and the cat will die from one of the consequential infections.

It is crucial for your pet's health, welfare and longevity that they are kept up to date with their vaccinations.

If you have any queries regarding the protocol we use for vaccinations or any other questions, please contact us on the phone 4872 1144, through email – [info@highlandsveterinaryhospital.com.au](mailto:info@highlandsveterinaryhospital.com.au) or through Facebook or the practice App to 'speak to' one of the members of our friendly team.

### **How often should my pet visit the vet?**

It is important for your pet to visit the vet annually or biannually (for seniors) for a comprehensive annual check-up.

Dogs and cats age faster than humans, therefore they must go to the vet more often

than we go to the doctor. It's a commonly known fact that one year of a pet's life is equivalent to 5- 7 human years, but this is quite simplified.

Puppies mature rapidly during the first year of their life and are considered to be teenagers after their first birthday. After 24 months they are approximately 25 years old. At this point the aging process slows down to about 7 years for every one human year for smaller breeds and 5 years for larger breeds.

In Summary: the most important thing to note is that dogs and cats actually age MUCH faster than we do and therefore must visit the vet on average of 2 times a year, especially if they are senior or geriatric.

#### To put this into perspective

If we get a physical check-up yearly, that's the equivalent to taking your pet to the vet every 5-7 years, which is not suitable if you want your pet to live a happy and fulfilled life.

#### Health Care Plans

Putting your dog or cat onto a preventative health care plan is a great way to ensure your pet is always up to date with their vaccinations and other preventative health care issues – as well as SAVING you MONEY.

HIGHlands Veterinary Hospital offers a Complete Care Package for all pets over the age of 7 years....