



VACCINATIONS: COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do vaccinations work? Your pet's **immune system** functions to help fight off diseases to which your pet may be exposed. **Antibodies** are small proteins that help the immune system recognize viruses, bacteria or other invading organisms. Each antibody is specifically programmed to recognize a single type of invader. Antibodies can be thought of as the body's security system-- the more antibodies there are to a given disease, the better equipped the body is to fight that disease. **Vaccinations**, by stimulating the immune system, enable it to develop large numbers of antibodies. Vaccinations "teach" the immune system to recognize certain diseases and fight them off before the pet gets sick.

Why does my young pet need repeated vaccinations? There are two reasons. First, giving an additional booster 2-4 weeks after an initial vaccine significantly increases the number of antibodies produced, making the vaccination much more effective. The second reason is more complicated. A newborn animal usually receives from its mother a pre-made set of antibodies to help defend it against disease until its own immune system is able to do so. These antibodies last for a variable number of weeks. Vaccinations given while these maternal antibodies are still present are less able to stimulate the young animal's own immune system. However, if we wait too long before starting vaccinations, the pet could be left unprotected. Therefore, young animals often need to receive a series of several vaccinations to provide their initial protection.

Why does my pet need booster shots? For many vaccinations the number of antibodies present in the body decreases with time. Boosters are a way to "re-teach" the immune system to recognize disease by restocking the body with fresh antibodies. The frequency of booster vaccinations depends on manufacturer labeling recommendations, state regulations, as well as other individual pet health issues that may make them more or less appropriate. Vaccination protocols are periodically reviewed in an effort to establish maximize safety and effectiveness.

Does my older pet still need vaccinations? Timely vaccinations are especially important for older animals since the immune system may be less efficient as the animal ages.

Why does my pet need an examination before his/her boosters? Vaccinations work best in a healthy animal. Not only might vaccinating a sick animal result in less protection, but it may further challenge the pet's immune system making it harder to fight off disease. Young animals are changing rapidly, so that problems may arise that were not evident just a few weeks previously. For older animals, an examination prior to vaccination often allows the veterinarian to spot problems unnoticed by the owner.

Can vaccinations themselves cause problems for my pet? Unfortunately, yes. While reactions to vaccinations are uncommon, they do occur. Short term reactions range from slight discomfort or swelling at the vaccination site to malaise/lethargy. More serious reactions include swelling of the face or anaphylactic reactions. Recent research also suggests that in a very small number of cats, tumors may develop at certain vaccination injection sites that may be related to the vaccine. At Metrowest Veterinary Associates we strive to choose vaccines and vaccination protocols that minimize the risk of problems. In animals that do experience a reaction to a vaccination, vaccine strategies and protocols are adjusted to minimize further risks.

Can my pet still get sick even if he/she is vaccinated? Vaccinations are not guaranteed to prevent disease because too many variables are involved. Like in people, animal immune systems have varying abilities to respond to vaccines and fight off disease. Additionally, if an animal is exposed to a disease shortly before or after vaccination it may not have enough time to activate the pet's immune system to prevent illness.

Do small pets get the same amount of vaccine as larger pets? Yes. Because vaccines work by stimulating the immune system to make its own antibodies, the same dosage is given to all animals of a given species no matter what their size. Therefore, a Chihuahua needs the same amount of vaccine as a Great Dane.

VACCINATIONS CURRENTLY AVAILABLE @ METROWEST VETERINARY ASSOCIATES, INC.

(Please note that all pets do not necessarily receive all vaccinations listed for their species. As protocols and recommendations change, specific vaccinations offered may change)

DOGS: Rabies, Distemper, Hepatitis (Adenovirus), Leptospirosis, Parainfluenza, Parvovirus, Lyme disease, Bordatella (Kennel cough), Canine Influenza
CATS: Rabies, Panleukopenia, Calicivirus, Rhinotracheitis, Feline leukemia

If you have any questions concerning your pet's vaccination needs, please feel free to ask the veterinarian or any member of our staff.