

Q and A about new vaccine protocol

Dr. Pete Keesling
San Martin Veterinary Hospital

Q: Our vet told us that our dog only needs distemper and parvo vaccinations every three years. This is different than what we're used to. We always went in every year for distemper and parvo shot. What have you heard about this? Will Flip be safe with these new vaccines?

A: Vaccination protocols have changed quite a bit of the past year or two, leaving people to ask about the efficacy and safety of these new inoculations. Why would we change vaccines when they already work so well to prevent diseases? It's a simple question that has a simple answer; veterinarians want to avoid vaccine-related raises as much as possible. The bottom line is that these new vaccinations are proven more effective. So they don't need to be given nearly as often.

Vaccines stimulate the immune system to produce antibodies to protect against disease. They're tested extensively before they're given formal approval by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Even so, there are some risks for problems with all injections. Occasionally, a vaccinated dog's immune system might mistakenly produce extra antibodies against his own red blood cells or platelets. In rare instances, he might develop a dangerous anemia. The risks are extremely low, but they exist with every shot a dog receives.

Most distemper and parvovirus vaccines are approved by the FDA only for use every single year. Their ability to prevent these diseases is questionable if they're used every three years. So up until recently, vets have given annual boosters. Now there's a new distemper and parvo vaccine that has earned FDA approval for use every three years and many vets are changing to it. It guarantees that your dog will be protected with only one shot every three years. Fewer injections mean fewer risks.

I recommend Flip be inoculated with this FDA-approved 3-year vaccine. He doesn't need annual boosters for distemper or parvovirus anymore. And by the way, this new vaccine requires only two inoculations for new puppies instead of the customary three or four that we've administered in the past. So big news! Dogs need fewer vaccinations throughout their lifetime. Sounds good, doesn't it?

Q: With the new three year vaccines, will our dog still need to go to the vet for an annual visit every year?

A: Absolutely. Annual examinations are essential to the good health of dogs and cats. Think of it this way. Many people equate 7 human years to every single year of a dog or cat's life. If we use that logic, then annual examinations for pets are the same as 7 year examinations for you and me. Most of us would never

wait seven years between doctor visits for ourselves. Too many things can happen in that much time. So why would we treat our pets any differently? You should schedule annual visits for your furry friends, and be prepared to ask questions about your pet's health. Have his heart checked, his teeth evaluated for gingivitis and tartar, and his eyes looked over for changes. Get a complete "under the hood" tuneup. That way, you'll know that your furry friend can live longer and healthier.

Besides all this, remember that the new 3-year vaccine protocol is only for distemper and parvovirus. Vaccines for kennel cough (bordatella) and lyme disease still require annual boosters for full protection. So there's no doubt that annual checkups are still the right thing to do for your pet.