

## Points on Pets: Should pet owners give at home vaccinations a shot?

by R.G.\_Elmor\_DVM

Q: I have tried to determine what vaccinations and parasite control methods would be best for my dogs and cats by reading pet care information on the Internet and in publications. I found that much of the information is conflicting; therefore, I am now thoroughly confused.

Because I have a medical background, I believe that I can administer vaccines and other drugs to prevent parasites if I could determine which ones to order off the Internet or from a catalog.

This, of course, would be less expensive and time-consuming compared to taking my pets to a veterinarian.

A: Although you want to save time and money through giving vaccinations and parasite prevention medications to your pets, it could be harmful and more costly in the long run. Your confusion about which vaccines and parasiticides is understandable.

Recommendations for administering vaccinations vary, depending on many factors. These include the risk for exposure to a particular disease in your geographical area, when the animal was last vaccinated for a certain disease, the specific vaccine previously administered, the age of the animal, the general health condition of the animal, whether or not the animal might be pregnant or may become pregnant, whether the animal is currently being given any medications and how the animal is housed. Because of these and many other variables, no one recommendation is appropriate for all animals.

The American Veterinary Medical Association's Council on Biological and Therapeutic Agents issues recommendations regarding vaccine usage to member veterinarians. These reports show approved core vaccines for diseases that are substantial risks for essentially all dogs and cats throughout the United States. It also lists noncore vaccines for diseases that are diagnosed less frequently and do not pose major threats to our pets.

Veterinarians have the knowledge and experience to tailor vaccination programs for each individual animal presented to them. Therefore, buying vaccinations and parasiticides on the Internet in order to administer yourself is not recommended.

When you pay a veterinarian to vaccinate your animals, you are paying not only for the vaccine, syringe and needle, but you are also paying for his or her knowledge and experience.

Q: We are wondering if our old, fat, lazy, spayed dog has thyroid problems. Can veterinarians conduct thyroid tests as human doctors do? Although we do not have a lot of money to spend on diagnostic tests or treatment, we are concerned about why our dog is becoming so lethargic.

A: You should make an appointment with your veterinarian as soon as possible to have a physical examination performed on your dog. After completing the examination and talking about your dog's history, your veterinarian can tell you whether or not additional diagnostic tests are needed. He or she can test a blood sample to determine if its thyroid gland is functioning properly.

Your veterinarian can inform you if your dog has a physical problem causing it to be lethargic, or if your dog is just slowing down because of old age.

You can also receive a health-care plan for your aging dog. This will help prolong its life, giving you and your four-footed companion as many years together as possible.

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