

The Alternative to Re-Vaccinating Your Pets Annually ...

Avoid unnecessary toxins ... use this expert-recommended modified vaccine schedule - along with the one specific process that tells whether immunization actually occurred ... How often does your pet really need a booster? It depends ... get the details inside.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

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In part 2 of this 4-part series, Dr. Becker continues her discussion with Dr. Ronald Schultz, a pioneer and expert in the field of veterinary vaccines. Listen as the doctors discuss what vaccines every pet needs and how long vaccines provide protection from disease. (Hint: it's much longer than you've been led to believe.)

Today I'm continuing my interview with Dr. Ronald Schultz, Professor and Chair, Department of Pathobiological Sciences, School of Veterinary Science at the University of Wisconsin – Madison.

In **part 1**, Dr. Schultz and I talked about core and non-core vaccines and the difference between vaccinating and immunizing. Today we continue our discussion of core vaccines for puppies and kittens and the length of immunity received from these vaccinations.

Core Vaccine Recommendations for Puppies and Kittens

Dr. Schultz recommends not starting a puppy or kitten vaccination program before 6 to 8 weeks of age, with re-vaccinations no more frequent than every four weeks. For example, if you start the program when a puppy is 8 weeks old, you would give another dose of the core vaccines at 12 weeks, and the third dose at 16 weeks.

What I do at my Natural Pet animal clinic is a first round of the cores before 12 weeks of age, like at 9 to 10 weeks. Then we boost between 15 and 16 weeks. Then we titer two weeks after the last round to see if there's been a response.

Dr. Schultz points out that we want to make sure the vaccinations have actually induced an immune response in the puppy or kitten. The best way to make that determination is with antibody titer tests for distemper and parvo in puppies, or panleukopenia in kittens, done between two to four weeks after the last vaccination.

When a puppy or kitten is between 14 and 16 weeks, the maternally-derived antibodies have dropped off, so there's no need to worry about residual antibodies left over from mom. If there's antibody present in the titer test, we know the baby's immune system has responded to the vaccine. This means we've not only vaccinated, but we've actually immunized as well.

Achieving immunity is the goal. We can put a lot of vaccines into pets, but if the dog or cat doesn't have a functional immunologic response, it's useless. Which means the animal has received all the toxicity of the vaccines and none of the benefit. The reason for vaccinations is to provide protective immunity against life-threatening diseases.

Vaccine Non-Responders

I asked Dr. Schultz at this point to briefly explain the rare circumstance in which there's a non-response to vaccination.

Unfortunately, there are genetic non-responders, which are animals that won't be immunized through vaccination no matter when they are injected.

Dr. Schultz estimates that about 1 in 1,000 puppies in the general population of dogs is a parvo non-responder. But because this is a function of genetics, certain breeds and more importantly, certain families (lineages) of dogs will have a much higher ratio than 1 in every 1,000. It might be 1 in 100, or even 1 in 10 that have no response.

Fortunately, animals that don't respond to one vaccine usually respond beautifully to the others. The non-response seems very strictly defined to a specific vaccine for a specific disease.

For distemper, the non-responders are about 1 in 5,000 in the general population. Dr. Schultz thinks this is probably due to the fact distemper has been in the canine species for much longer than parvo. Parvo didn't become a problem for canines until the late 1970s.

Puppy and Kitten Shots Often Provide Lifelong Immunity

Back to the subject of core vaccines and establishing immunity in puppies and kittens ...

After we've established protective immunity with a modified vaccine protocol and titers to insure an immune system response to the vaccines, those pets are protected for life.

If we follow the protocol as laid out above, titering two to four weeks after the last round of vaccines at 14 to 16 weeks of age, and we confirm the babies' immune systems have responded to the vaccinations, there is no reason to continue to re-vaccinate those animals.

There's no reason to re-vaccinate, because giving a dog or cat boosters of the same vaccines doesn't mean he's more protected. Many pet owners are led to believe — often by the reminders sent by their veterinarian's office — that the vaccines 'expire.' It's frustrating, because these reminders are intended to provoke fear in responsible pet owners.

Dr. Schultz points out that like the MMR vaccine for children, the three core vaccines for puppies and kittens have the potential to provide lifelong immunity. We're not positive that every animal receives lifelong immunity, which is why we vaccinate a few times during that animal's life.

It depends on whether you want to take a minimalistic approach to vaccinating, which both Dr. Schultz and I take with our pets. But a lot of pet owners aren't comfortable with that approach.

What Dr. Schultz recommends for puppies and kittens that don't receive antibody titers two or more weeks after the last puppy shot, re-vaccination should be done in a year, which is what the American Animal Hospital Association and the American Association of Feline Practitioners recommend.

Going forward, Dr. Schultz recommends re-vaccination after 3 years or longer, but not more often than 3 years. Since the majority of these pets will have received immunity for life, many pet owners end up opting to titer at three years rather than to automatically vaccinate. The option with the 3-year guideline, then, is whether to titer to test immunity or go ahead and vaccinate.

Most visitors to MercolaHealthyPets.com aren't interested in vaccinating their pets when it's not necessary, so that's when titering becomes a great option to have. At my animal hospital, we don't automatically revaccinate every 3 years for animals that were not tittered 2-4 weeks after their last puppy/kitten vaccine, we titer instead (to see if additional vaccines are needed).

Titering Methods

Next I wanted to talk with Dr. Schultz about the different methods of titering, as there are several.

The 'gold standard' titer tests are performed only in diagnostic labs associated with veterinary schools, whereas the commercial tests that are available use different methodologies. The commercial test results are correlated with gold standard test results so they can be understood.

Diagnostic labs report results in terms of numbers which they attach great importance to. Dr. Schultz believes the specific numbers don't mean anything as long as they're positive – which indicates the presence of an immune response. It's important to note that any measurable titer means the immune system responded. Some some labs recommend revaccination when a titer is present, but low. This is not what Dr. Schultz or I recommend.

If you have results on one of the gold standard tests — like the Virus Neutralization Test for distemper – of, say, a 4 or an 8 or a 16 or a 32 or a 64, that means that animal's immune system has developed antibody, it is primed. And if the animal is exposed to distemper, if the distemper isn't immediately neutralized, there will be a secondary memory response and the animal will be protected.

Just like with you or I, if we encounter a flu virus we haven't been exposed to in 10 or 20 years, our immune system will retain memory to produce an adequate immunological response to the virus.
