

This Growing Movement Is Pitting Vets vs. Pet Owners

If you're part of this growing trend (which is healthy), and you seek care from a conventional vet, they may think you're uninformed and given to fits of paranoia. Are you in the wrong?

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- An article in a conventional veterinary journal attempted to paint people who are cautious about vaccinating their pets as uninformed "hipsters" given to fits of paranoia
- The facts are that an increasing number of concerned, not paranoid, pet parents are objecting to the routine re-vaccination of their dogs. "Anti-vaxxers" and "responsible vaxxers" are two entirely different populations the media has confused
- Younger pet owners and those who've seen an animal become ill after a vaccination are showing more concern than their vets about the dangers of over vaccinating pets
- The goal of veterinarians and pet owners should be to immunize companion animals against disease, and confirm enduring immunity through antibody titer tests
- Repeatedly vaccinating dogs against core canine diseases does not enhance their immunity, and amplifies the risk of adverse vaccine reactions

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published September 27, 2017.

An article published in a conventional veterinary journal about pet-owning anti-vaxxers is a good example of what many pet parents are up against when dealing with their veterinarians.

To prove her case, instead of using examples of diseases directly linked to veterinary vaccines, the author of the article, Kerry Lengyel, used examples of dog owners concerned their pets might develop autism after being vaccinated, "even though autism has never been diagnosed in a dog."¹

Her point, apparently, was to demonstrate what the conventional veterinary community considers to be the utter stupidity of pet owners who are concerned about the potential for vaccine adverse reactions, as well as the unstudied and unknown immunologic side effects of unnecessary annual revaccinations over the lifetime of a pet.

Shouldn't Vets Be at Least as Concerned About Vaccine Reactions as Pet Owners?

For her article, Lengyel talked with a veterinarian in California who says he has seen an increase in the number of pet owners who don't want their dogs vaccinated "for conditions such as distemper and parvovirus."

Of course, we don't know whether this vet was talking about pet owners balking at initial vaccinations (puppy shots), or lifelong re-vaccinations for the same diseases. Most people don't object to the initial series of puppy shots or the booster at one year.

However, an increasing number of concerned pet owners are definitely objecting to repeated re-vaccinations on an every one-year or three-year schedule, because veterinarians can't give them an honest answer as to why those vaccines need to be given over and over and over.

Younger Pet Parents 'Just Feel That Injecting Chemicals Into Their Pet Is Going to Cause Problems'

According to Lengyel, some of the skepticism about vaccines "may correspond to the more holistic lifestyle of the younger generation that has flocked to the trendy city" (Brooklyn, NY, in this case). Looks like she's taking a shot at holistic lifestyles (however she defines them), and younger pet parents who she assumes are being influenced by life in the "trendy city."

Once again, she seems to be trying to illustrate the utter stupidity of pet parents who dare to doubt the necessity of re-vaccinations. Another veterinarian Lengyel interviewed for her article chimes in with this gem: "It's actually much more common in the hipster-y areas. I really don't know what the reasoning is, they just feel that injecting chemicals into their pet is going to cause problems."

Gee, you think maybe that's it? What a crazy notion! Well-educated people thinking their 4-pound Yorkie may not need the same booster shot as their 150 pound Mastiff, crazy, right?!

Vaccines 'Tank Immune Systems, Allowing a Welcome Mat for Illnesses'

Lengyel did redeem herself somewhat toward the end of her article by interviewing one savvy dog owner who is "strongly against over-vaccination for pets because vaccines 'tank immune systems, allowing a welcome mat for illnesses.'" Maureen Murray of San Francisco told Lengyel, "Previously, I had one young dog form an aggressive type of brain cancer shortly after [receiving] vaccinations. That cancer was probably encouraged by a weakened immune system caused by over-vaccination."

Murray told Lengyel she remains a strong advocate for vaccination of puppies and young dogs, but not for all adult dogs. Murray is exactly the type of pet owner mentioned earlier — she believes in initial puppy vaccinations, but not repetitive vaccinations of adult dogs. Murray also talked to Lengyel about the importance and value of **titer testing** as an alternative to booster vaccinations. Lengyel cited an excerpt from the American Animal Hospital Association's vaccine guidelines:

"... [T]iter testing is an appropriate way to determine whether previously administered vaccines in dogs are still providing immunity to parvovirus, distemper, and adenovirus. Titer tests can enable veterinarians to devise customized vaccine protocols for individual pets."

The Goal Should Be to Immunize Pets, Not to Vaccinate Them Over and Over

Lengyel's article appeared in the August edition of the veterinary journal probably because the veterinary community uses the CDC's National Immunization Awareness Month of August to promote pet vaccination awareness.

The goal is to encourage vaccinations, though the word they use is immunization, not vaccination. This is a hugely important distinction. Vaccination and immunization are not one and the same. Immunization is the outcome of effective vaccination against disease and/or exposure to a disease that the animal recovers from.

The act of administering a vaccine doesn't automatically mean the animal has been immunized against the disease, however, that is the assumption.

Sterile Immunity Can Last a Lifetime

When an animal is successfully vaccinated against certain diseases (distemper, parvo and adenovirus in dogs) and becomes immunized, she receives what we call sterile immunity. Sterile immunity lasts a minimum of seven to nine years, up to a maximum of lifetime immunity as measured by titer tests. This means the dog cannot become infected, nor will she shed the virus should she be exposed. Since the diseases of distemper, parvo and hepatitis (adenovirus) are everywhere, the risk of exposure is constant.

Other types of vaccines, typically non-core vaccines (called bacterins) against bacterial derived diseases such as Lyme disease, leptospirosis, bordetella (kennel cough), canine influenza (a virus, but one that mutates constantly so vaccine is not consistently protective) and others, do not produce sterile immunity.

These vaccines last a year at most, and antibody levels against these diseases (as measured by titer tests) decrease with each passing year, meaning lifelong protection is questionable. Running IFA (immunofluorescence antibody) titer tests for parvo and distemper is preferable because they give a clear-cut answer, either "yes the animal is protected" or "no the animal is not protected."

Serology and other testing methods can be confusing for owners. For example, a low serology score doesn't mean the pet isn't protected against disease. It's possible an animal may still be protected for up to a year or longer thanks to immune memory cells.

For purposes of comparison, veterinary core vaccines are similar to human polio and MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccines that provide lifetime immunity. Non-core veterinary vaccines can be compared to the human tetanus vaccine, which is also a bacterin and may not last for a lifetime.

How to Play It Safe and Smart with Your Dog's Vaccinations

Discuss what kinds of vaccines your pet needs, and how often, with your veterinarian. Try to find a holistic vet to care for your pet, especially when it comes to vaccinations.

If you can't locate a holistic vet in your area, make sure not to take your pet to any veterinary practice that promotes annual or more frequent re-vaccinations. Also try to avoid any boarding facility, groomer, training facility or other animal service that requires you to vaccinate your pet more than necessary. Look for pet care providers who accept antibody titer tests in lieu of proof of vaccination. Insure each vaccine your dog receives meets the following criteria:

- Your pet is healthy! Animals must be healthy to receive vaccines, so if your pet has allergies, endocrine issues, organ dysfunction, cancer (or is a cancer survivor) or another medical issue he or she is NOT a candidate to receive vaccines.
- It is for a life-threatening disease (this eliminates most on the list immediately).

- Your pet has the opportunity to be exposed to the disease.
- The vaccine is considered both effective and safe (most aren't, especially the bacterins).
- Do not vaccinate a pet that has had a previous vaccine reaction of any kind.
- If you do vaccinate your pet, ask your holistic vet to provide a homeopathic vaccine detox such as Thuja (a common choice for all vaccines except rabies).

Rabies vaccines are required by law, but insist on the three-year versus the one-year vaccine and request the homeopathic rabies vaccine detoxifier Lyssin from your holistic vet. If your pet is young, ask to have the rabies vaccine given after 4 months of age, preferably closer to 6 months, to reduce the risk of an adverse reaction. Sick pets, including those with cancer, should never be vaccinated against rabies.

Sources and References

¹ [dvm360, August 10, 2017](#)
