

# DOG VACCINATION



## Canine infectious diseases in the UK

Infectious diseases once killed thousands of pets each year. Thankfully veterinary science has advanced significantly and these killer diseases can now be vaccinated against. Although vaccination has not eradicated infectious diseases completely, it has dramatically reduced the frequency of these diseases and therefore saved many canine lives.

### What is a vaccination?

Like all animals, your dog has an immune system which is the body's natural ability to fight infection. Vaccination works by exposing the body to a small but entirely harmless dose of the disease in question. The dog's immune system then reacts by producing a defence and can cleverly "remember" how to defend against the disease again. This "memory" will however fade in time, increasing the risk that the dog's body cannot put up a strong enough defence. Vaccination reminds the dog's immune system how to defend against the disease again.

### What diseases can we vaccinate against?

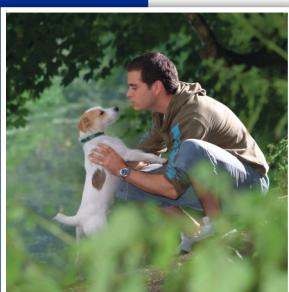
**Parvovirus** - A highly contagious virus which attacks the dog's digestive tract, causing vomiting diarrhoea, depression and dehydration. Sadly it is often fatal. Dogs of all ages can be infected with parvovirus but puppies are the most susceptible. It can be spread directly between dogs or by contact with contaminated items such as bedding, bowls, toys or even hands. It is a hardy virus that can survive in the environment for a long time. The incidence of parvovirus have reduced since it first appeared as a major epidemic in the 1970s but the disease is still quite widespread in pockets in the UK.

**Distemper** - This virus can cause only mild symptoms in some dogs but can be fatal in others. Young dogs are the most susceptible to the disease. Symptoms range from runny eyes and nose and coughing to severe vomiting and fitting. Thankfully the virus cannot survive easily in the environment and is most commonly spread by close dog-to-dog contact. The disease is now fairly rare in the UK thanks to vaccination but is still common in Europe.

**Infectious Hepatitis** - This disease affects the liver, kidneys, eyes and lungs of a dog and can develop very quickly, sadly some individuals die within hours of becoming unwell. It is transmitted by contact with the urine, faeces and saliva of infected dogs. Dogs who recover from the disease can incubate and spread the virus for more than 6 months. It is also a relatively hardy virus that can survive months in the environment. Although it still exists in the UK, it is fairly uncommon.

**Leptospirosis** - This bacterial disease is spread by contact with the urine of infected animals. It is a serious zoonotic disease, which means it can affect people where it is known as "Weil's Disease". Exposure to the bacteria is relatively common and most often carried by rat urine. Rivers, ditch water or even puddles can harbour the bacteria. Leptospirosis can be difficult to diagnose and treat and sadly it can often prove fatal to dogs.

**Kennel cough** - Contrary to what the name suggests, kennel cough isn't only present in the kennel environment. The full name is canine infectious tracheobronchitis and is transmitted by direct contact between dogs. So it can be spread wherever dogs meet for example at the park or at dog shows or social events. It causes an extremely unpleasant cough for the dog but is rarely fatal. It remains widespread throughout the UK, because like the common cold there are many strains of the bacteria. Vaccination cannot fully prevent kennel cough but it does significantly reduce the risk to the dog.



**Rabies** - This extremely dangerous virus is transmitted through a bite from an infected animal. It is also zoonotic (can spread to people) and is almost always fatal. Rabies affects the neurological system of the dogs and symptoms worsen over time including behaviour changes (such as aggression), seizures, disorientation, paralysis, coma and ultimately death. There has been no known cases of rabies in the UK for over a century although it is still a serious problem in much of the rest of the world. Vaccination is highly recommended for all travelling pets and compulsory if you wish to bring them back to UK.



### **Why vaccinate?**

It is worth remembering that many of the diseases we vaccinate against are killers, only a vaccination can prevent your dog from contracting the disease if they are exposed to infection. Due to the infectious nature of the diseases, you will find if you need to put your dog needs to stay in kennels, they will request proof that your dog is regularly vaccinated. Travelling on a Pets Passport also requires regular vaccination.

### **When should my dog be vaccinated?**

Puppies are protected from infectious diseases for the first few weeks of life thanks to the immunity they get passed from their mother when they feed. This immunity fades quickly, leaving puppies vulnerable to disease. For this reason we advise puppies are vaccinated with a course of two injections 2-4 weeks apart. These initial courses can be given from six weeks old. As discussed earlier, immunity provided by the vaccination will wane over time making it necessary for dogs to have a booster vaccination every year.

### **Are annual boosters really necessary?**

The immune system of each dog responds differently and the recommended time between vaccinations is based on the minimal period of protection. There have been studies to determine if the immunity period can be extended to more than a year and for some diseases it can be. For example the part of the injection that protects against distemper only has to be given every 3 years. However, there are no vaccines available that protect your dog against leptospirosis or kennel cough for more than a year. For this reason, we recommend your dog is vaccinated annually.

### **I've heard vaccinations cause more illness than they prevent. Is that true?**

As with any medicinal product, adverse reactions can happen. It is however exceptionally rare for there to be a serious reaction to vaccination injections. Dog vaccines have been tested thoroughly for safety and efficacy. A recent study of 4000 dogs showed no evidence that vaccinated dogs showed more illness than unvaccinated dogs, in fact it was the opposite.



**If you have any questions about the diseases we vaccinate against, please speak to a member of our staff at any of our surgeries (an appointment may be necessary).**



**The Cromwell Veterinary Group Ltd**

**Huntingdon:** 01480 52601 **St Neots:** 01480 216612 **St Ives:** 01480 300389

**Ramsey:** 01487 814789 **Cambourne:** 01954 715161 **Sawtry:** 01487 800199

**24hr hospital Huntingdon:** 01480 52222

[enquiries@cromwellvets.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@cromwellvets.co.uk)

[www.cromwellvets.co.uk](http://www.cromwellvets.co.uk)

