

# Getting your pet vaccinated



**BVA client leaflet Number 9 • June 2014**

## Why it is important to vaccinate your pet

Vaccinations are given to pets to prevent certain diseases and illness caused by micro-organisms, often viruses. These diseases are difficult or impossible to treat and can be fatal. Today, we have more opportunity than ever to make sure our pets lead healthy lives. Even though we can prevent and control the spread of several serious diseases by following our vet's advice about the important vaccinations that our pets need, many are still not vaccinated which may mean that they are vulnerable to serious illness and may die if they are exposed to an infectious disease.

Infectious and contagious diseases are spread by physical contact or contact with bodily fluids, or they may be picked up from the environment or water if either are contaminated. Disease can also be airborne and pass from one animal or person to another. Your vet can tell you how to best protect your pet. It usually involves just an initial course of injections and then boosters at regular intervals throughout your pet's life to protect them and prevent the spread of disease. Vaccination courses and boosters vary from animal to animal and for different diseases.

Protecting your pet in this way helps to protect everyone else's pet because the more animals that are immune to a disease, the more difficult it is for a disease to spread. This is the same as vaccinations given to people to prevent the spread of infectious diseases like measles and to stop an epidemic from taking place. As with people, there can be some side effects with vaccinations but these are usually mild and short-lived. Serious or allergic reactions are rare.

Remember that prevention is better than cure. There is often no cure and animals that do survive can be left with permanent damage from a disease.

## Common diseases you can protect your pets against

### Dogs

#### ● **Canine parvovirus 'parvo'**

This causes severe, life-threatening gastro-enteritis.

#### ● **Canine distemper virus 'hardpad'**

This causes fever, digestive and breathing symptoms. It then affects the nervous system, commonly causing convulsions and then death.

#### ● **Leptospirosis**

This causes severe kidney and liver problems. Some strains are also infectious to people and can be potentially fatal.

#### ● **Infectious canine hepatitis**

This causes digestive problems, fever and jaundice. 50% of young dogs affected die.

#### ● **Infectious cough** (also known as kennel cough)

It is not life-threatening but if your dog is mixing with other dogs the vaccination is recommended. It causes a hacking cough and can cause other breathing problems.

#### ● **Rabies**

This is still a common disease in many parts of the world and kills tens of thousands of animals and people. Rabies causes an invariably fatal infection in the brain, when an animal is bitten by an infected animal.

If you are taking your dog abroad you must vaccinate it against rabies.

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## Cats

### ● **Feline infectious enteritis**

This causes severe, life-threatening gastro-enteritis.

### ● **Feline herpes virus**

This causes upper respiratory problems and is often called 'cat flu'. Infected cats become carriers of the virus which can flare up and cause the disease again.

### ● **Feline calici virus**

Another 'cat flu' like virus which can flare up again and again.

### ● **Feline leukaemia virus**

This virus causes severe disease which usually affects the immune system and can cause tumours. The vaccination is recommended for cats that may come into contact with other cats e.g. cats that go outside. 'House cats' who never leave the owner's home are at a negligible risk.

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## Rabbits

### ● **Myxomatosis**

This causes skin tumours and in some cases blindness, followed by fatigue (tiredness) and fever. It is a fatal disease.

### ● **Haemorrhagic enteritis**

This causes a highly infectious and often fatal disease.

Most of the diseases mentioned are highly infectious – an animal only needs to be exposed to a few particles to become ill. Most of the conditions are viruses, for which we have no specific treatment and antibiotics don't work against viruses. Because of this, prevention by vaccination is extremely important.

## About the BVA

The BVA is the national representative body for the UK veterinary profession. We support our members to fulfil their roles for the benefit of animals and the public.

This is one of a series of leaflets for animal owners produced by the BVA, you can find more at

[www.bva.co.uk/public](http://www.bva.co.uk/public)