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**Basic Dog Vaccinations: What You Need To Know**

Keeping your dog vaccinated is one of the most important things you can do to keep them healthy and protect them from serious diseases. Vaccines are designed to boost your dog’s immune system, helping them fight off illnesses that could make them very sick. This guide covers the basic vaccinations your dog needs, why they’re important, when to get them, and where to find affordable options.

**Core Vaccines: The Must-Haves for Every Dog**

Some vaccinations are considered essential, or “core,” because they protect your dog from diseases that are either very common or very serious. Core vaccines are recommended for all dogs, regardless of where they live or their lifestyle.

* **Rabies**: The rabies vaccine is legally required in most areas because rabies is a deadly disease that can spread from animals to people. Rabies is almost always fatal once symptoms appear, so this vaccine is mandatory. Puppies usually receive their first rabies shot between 12–16 weeks of age, followed by a booster after one year. After that, most dogs need a rabies booster every 1-3 years, depending on local laws and the type of rabies vaccine they receive.
* **Distemper, Parvovirus, and Adenovirus (DAPP)**: This combination vaccine protects against several serious diseases, including distemper, parvovirus, and adenovirus. Distemper is a contagious disease that attacks a dog’s respiratory and nervous systems. Parvovirus is a highly contagious virus that causes severe vomiting and diarrhea, especially dangerous for puppies. Adenovirus causes infectious hepatitis, a liver disease. The DAPP vaccine is usually given as a series of shots starting when puppies are around 6-8 weeks old, with boosters until they are about 16 weeks old. After that, they’ll need boosters every 1–3 years to stay protected.

**Non-Core Vaccines: Based On Location and Lifestyle**

Some vaccines are considered “non-core,” which means they’re only needed for certain dogs based on factors like where you live, your dog’s lifestyle, and other health risks.

* **Bordetella (Kennel Cough)**: Bordetella is bacteria that cause kennel cough, a respiratory infection that spreads easily in places where dogs are close together, like boarding facilities, dog parks, or grooming salons. If your dog spends time in these settings, a Bordetella vaccine may be recommended. This vaccine may be given as a shot or nasal spray, and it may need to be repeated every 6–12 months depending on your vet’s recommendation.
* **Lyme Disease**: Lyme disease is spread by ticks and can cause joint pain, fever, and other health issues. If you live in an area where ticks are common, or if your dog spends a lot of time outdoors, your vet may suggest the Lyme vaccine.
* **Leptospirosis**: Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease that spreads through water or soil contaminated with infected animal urine. Dogs who spend a lot of time in wooded areas, lakes, or ponds are at a higher risk. Your vet may recommend this vaccine based on your dog’s activities and environment.

**Puppy Vaccinations: Getting Started Early**

Vaccinations usually start when puppies are around 6–8 weeks old and continue every 3–4 weeks until they’re about 16 weeks old. This series of shots is important because puppies’ immune systems are still developing, and they need regular boosters to build strong protection against diseases.

The typical puppy vaccination schedule includes:

* **6–8 Weeks**: DAPP vaccine
* **10–12 Weeks**: DAPP booster, possible Bordetella if recommended
* **14–16 Weeks**: DAPP booster and first rabies vaccine

These vaccines help ensure your puppy stays healthy as they grow. Be sure to ask your vet about any other vaccines that might be important for your puppy’s lifestyle and environment.

**Yearly Boosters: Keeping Immunity Strong**

Most vaccines don’t last forever, which is why your dog will need boosters to stay protected. Booster shots “refresh” your dog’s immunity, so they’re still able to fight off illnesses. Typically, core vaccines like DAPP and rabies need to be boosted every 1–3 years, depending on the specific vaccine and your vet’s recommendation.

Boosters are especially important for adult dogs because their immunity from the original vaccinations can weaken over time. Staying up-to-date with boosters also helps prevent the spread of contagious diseases to other animals and people.

**Finding Affordable Vaccination Options**

Vaccines are an important investment in your dog’s health, but they don’t have to be expensive. Many places offer low-cost vaccines to help make them accessible for all pet owners:

* **Animal Shelters**: Local animal shelters often host low-cost vaccination clinics or can refer you to affordable options in the area.
* **Pet Supply Stores**: Some pet supply stores partner with veterinarians to offer low-cost vaccines during certain times or events. It’s worth asking about these services if you’re looking for a budget-friendly option.
* **Low-Cost Vet Clinics**: Many areas have low-cost veterinary clinics that offer essential vaccinations at reduced prices.

If you need help finding affordable vaccines, reach out to your local animal shelter. They often know about resources or upcoming clinics that can make getting your dog vaccinated more affordable.

**Why Vaccines Are So Important**

Vaccines do more than just protect your dog—they help keep other pets and people safe, too. By vaccinating your dog, you’re helping prevent the spread of serious diseases in your community. This is especially true for rabies, a disease that can be fatal to both pets and humans. Vaccines also help prevent the heartbreak of losing a pet to a preventable illness.

Vaccinating your dog according to their needs and staying up-to-date on boosters is a simple and effective way to keep them happy and healthy. Remember, your veterinarian can help guide you on which vaccines your dog needs and when they should be given.