



While vaccine administration is not an innocuous procedure, the benefits of vaccination far outweigh the risks for the majority of pets. We must continue to vaccinate our patients to prevent recrudescence of infectious diseases we now control. The objective of vaccination protocols should be to vaccinate more pets in the population, vaccinate individuals less frequently and only for the diseases for which there is a risk of exposure and disease.

In other words, rather than being viewed as a routine, annual requirement and the driving force behind the annual exam, vaccination should be a carefully considered medical procedure discussed thoroughly with the pet owner. At each visit, vaccination requirements should be reviewed as the risk factors for that patient change through life.

The BVC Vaccine Policy

...will be designed based upon our local experience in the UAE and upon your pet's future travel plans. Let us know where you plan to go in the future and we will design the vaccine schedule that best suits you.

Vaccination at the BVC is more than just the set of shots everyone is familiar with. It is a time to give your pet a general check out and find any problems that may have escaped your notice since the last visit.

Vaccines commonly used

Cats: are commonly vaccinated against cat flu (two types - calicivirus and herpesvirus (rhinotracheitis), enteritis, leukaemia (if at risk) and rabies. There is a high street-cat density in the UAE due to the accessibility of excess waste food in open skips. The street level disease incidence is, therefore, higher than in many other regions and it is strongly recommended that cats are properly vaccinated. Indoor cats are not free from disease risk, contrary to popular opinion. Feline enteritis is a tough virus and can be carried indirectly on people's shoes, right into your pet's environment. The unvaccinated pet is at risk, even if living in an apartment. On the other hand, feline leukaemia does not spread easily by indirect transmission. This more fragile virus does not survive for long outside the affected animal so is of less risk. It is mostly spread by closer contact with infected cats. If your pet lives in isolation she does not require feline leukaemia vaccination but should have the others.

Dogs: are commonly vaccinated against distemper, hepatitis, parvovirus, leptospirosis, parainfluenza virus and rabies. Coronavirus and bordetella can also be added to the regime and special situations may require additional disease cover, depending on where you intend to take your pet. Bordetella is often best used strategically as immunity to this nose drop vaccine is relatively short-lived and should be timed to coincide with increased risk such as kenneling during holidays.

Vaccination is an integral part of your pets preventive health program.

There are numerous other vaccines that can be used to protect your pet. Please let us know if you feel your pet may need more than the routine cover.

When to vaccinate - (BVC policy - other vets may differ on this standard routine):

Primary vaccination course;

Kittens from 6 weeks old

- boost every 3 weeks until 12 weeks
- or from 4 weeks in high risk situations, e.g. kittens rescued from the street
- Rabies given at 12 weeks old

Puppies from 6 weeks old

- boost at 9, 12 and (in some cases) 16 weeks old
- Rabies at 12 weeks old

Subsequent Booster Shots

are required at one year of age and then:

- Cats every three years for standard triple vac (calici, herpes and feline parvovirus).
 - Rabies every 3 years (Unless travel plans require more)
- Dogs
 - DHLPP every three years,
 - Leptospirosis every year
 - Bordetella (kennel cough) nose drop vaccine given within 6 months of kenneling.
 - Rabies every 3 years (Unless travel plans require more)

When not to vaccinate:

if your pet is ill (your vet will do an examination before giving vaccine)

there may be restrictions on certain vaccine types or brands during pregnancy. If you think your pet may be pregnant, please inform your veterinary surgeon.

if your pet has an allergy or other reaction to vaccines. You will only know this from previous experience. Again, please inform your vet if your pet has reacted badly to previous vaccines or other medications.

if your pet is less than 6 weeks old.

if a future destination country requires absence of vaccine history. This is for selected diseases only - a vaccine course is still given but with certain specific components removed as requested by the importing country.

Vaccine Reactions

Mild fever and tiredness are common for pets a day or two following vaccination. Similar reactions are experienced by humans when we have our shots. Do not be tempted to give drugs yourself to your pet for this problem (or any other). Pets can be made seriously ill by common drugs and strengths used by humans. Note that drugs such as acetaminophen e.g. "Calpol", paracetamol and others can be toxic to pets, more so if they are not drinking well. Even paediatric doses can be dangerous for pets so please call your vet if you are worried about your pet. Most pets will improve on their own following any vaccine fever or lethargy but call your vet if you are concerned.

Anaphylaxis or immediate strong allergy reactions are rare but can be dangerous. In the same way that a few unlucky people are allergic to bee stings, animals can have anaphylactic reactions to drugs, including vaccines. Sometimes it is not the vaccine itself that is the problem, but rather the adjuvant used to make it more effective. If this is suspected you could try using non-adjuvanted vaccine. It would also be sensible to have your pet observed by your veterinary surgeon as bad reactions can be dealt with effectively if treated fast enough. In rare cases it may be safer to avoid vaccination altogether, but you then have to live with the risk of waning immunity as your pet gets older. As with all medical treatments, the advantages must outweigh the disadvantages. Anyone who has witnessed distemper or parvo in dogs, or serious cat flu or enteritis in cats, will know that these are diseases best avoided. For the vast majority of pets, the benefits of vaccine protection far outweigh the small risk of adverse reactions.

Fibrosarcoma in cats has attracted attention recently. Fibrosarcoma is a locally aggressive reaction to the vaccine, or the adjuvant in the vaccine. Although these growths do not usually spread to other distant parts of the body, they can penetrate deep into nearby tissue and can be difficult to get rid of. Surgery is required and is successful if all reactive tissue is removed. In some cases, especially if left untreated a long time, it is not possible to remove all the growth and animals have been euthanased following untreatable fibrosarcoma. While we investigate these problems it is recommended that surgery is performed immediately on any growth appearing at a vaccine site. This is a radical approach. In the past, vets advised pet owners to leave these lumps and it is true that most will subside with time. However, a few will become fibrosarcomas. Because early surgery is safe and maximises success, we believe this to be the best course of action if your pet develops a lump at a vaccine site.

Note: vaccines are an essential part of your pets preventive medicine program and are required by many countries. In only a few cases is it sensible to avoid routine vaccination.