SPRINGTIME feature...

The importance of Vaccination!

Whether to vaccinate and what we should vaccinate against has in recent years caused a lot of debate in human medicine. A similar debate has taken place in the veterinary field. Our aim is always to provide adequate protection for our pets without over vaccinating.

All animals will acquire a certain amount of immunity via their mother. This is called maternal immunity and is usually present until approximately 10 weeks of age. The protection provided by this immunity will depend upon the mother’s immunity. It is therefore essential that if you are planning on breeding from your bitch or queen, you ensure that they are fully vaccinated. If puppies or kittens are born to unvaccinated mothers, be aware that they may be vulnerable and an extra early vaccination may be appropriate.

The diseases which we vaccinate dogs against are all potential killers. The viral diseases can rapidly make a puppy or vulnerable adult dog seriously ill, causing acute, intensive veterinary intervention. Vaccination offers protection from these diseases which, although not common, are a huge risk to the wellbeing of your pet.

In general, dogs are usually vaccinated as puppies between 9 and 12 weeks old, with kittens being vaccinated between 9 and 12 weeks. Boosters are required every year. To establish exactly how long immunity lasts it would be necessary to blood sample the animal and vaccinate accordingly. It is well established that for most vaccine brands, immunity to Distemper, Parvovirus and Canine Hepatitis will last for 3 years. Immunity to Leptospira however, is not long lived and it is advisable to blood sample the animal and vaccinate accordingly. It is well established that for most vaccine brands, immunity will last for 10 weeks. Boosters are required every year. To establish exactly how long immunity lasts it would be necessary to blood sample the animal and vaccinate accordingly.

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The cat flea is also an intermediate host for the tapeworm Dipyldium caninum, one of the most common gut worms found in dogs, cats, and rarely, children. Immature flea larva eat the egg of the tapeworm, the egg develops into the next stage inside the adult flea, and is swallowed along with the flea during grooming.

The other major problem fleas cause to cats is Flea Allergy Dermatitis (FAD). We see FAD frequently, and it is in fact the most common cause of itchy skin disease in cats. Unfortunately it is often difficult to prove that fleas are the cause, as allergic cats tend to groom much more than normal and often remove the adult fleas and their "dirt.

FAD is seen in cats which develop an allergic reaction to flea saliva and can affect cats of any age, sex, or breed. The signs of the infestation are secondary to the constant itching caused by FAD which leads to overgrooming, hair loss, broken hairs, scabs, skin infections, and sometimes redness and weight loss. Because of the allergic cats are so sensitive to flea bites, only one or two bites a week can be enough to keep the cycle of itching going for the poor animal.

Treatments to kill and eradicate fleas have improved dramatically in recent years. There is however, a vast and confusing array of products available. What is not always apparent is that these products vary markedly in their composition, mode of action, effectiveness and safety.

Fleas are incredibly efficient breeders, one adult can become 1,000 fleas within 21 days if you find adult fleas on your pet, there is likely an infestation, the other 95% will be in your home as flea eggs, larvae and pupae, infestation, the other 95% will be in your environment and drink from.

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