

New Canine Vaccine Rules Rolled Out — Can You Guess What They Now Endorse?

Story at-a-glance

- The American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) has issued a new set of canine vaccine guidelines for 2017
- There are no notable changes to core vaccine recommendations (distemper, parvo, adenovirus and rabies), except that the parainfluenza virus is now considered an optional core according to the AAHA
- As always, my canine vaccine protocol differs from the AAHA guidelines, especially with regard to non-core vaccines
- For the first time, the AAHA acknowledges that titer tests are useful in determining dogs' immunity to distemper, parvo and adenovirus

By Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

The American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) has updated their canine vaccination guidelines for 2017.¹ These are the guidelines conventional veterinarians use. The last update was in 2011, and thankfully ushered in some new-and-improved thinking about the duration of core vaccines and how often to vaccinate.

Whereas prior to 2011, canine core vaccines (distemper, parvo and adenovirus) were supposed to be given yearly, the [2011 guidelines stated that core vaccines](#) could be given at three-year or greater intervals. In addition, the AAHA admitted that immunity lasts at least five years for [distemper](#) and parvo, and at least seven years for adenovirus.

The reason for the updated guidelines seems to be to address new (non-core) vaccines developed in the last six years. I don't recommend non-cores unless the risk of acquiring the disease is significant and outweighs the [potential risks associated with the vaccines](#).

2017 AAHA Canine Core Vaccination Recommendations

• **Combination vaccine to include Canine Distemper (CDV) + Canine Parvo (CPV-2) + Canine Adenovirus (CAV-2) + (optional) Canine Parainfluenza Virus (CPiV)**

Initial vaccination in puppies up to 16 weeks of age: Starting as early as 6 weeks, administer combo vaccine every two to four weeks up to at least 16 weeks. Dogs in high-risk environments may benefit from a final dose at 18 to 20 weeks.

Initial vaccination in dogs over 16 weeks of age: Administer one or two combo vaccines. Dogs between 16 and 20 weeks living in high-risk environments may benefit from two combo shots two to four weeks apart. Revaccination: Administer a booster no later than one year after completion of initial series or dose, then every three years or longer thereafter.

•Rabies 1-year and 3-year

Initial vaccination should be one dose no earlier than 12 weeks of age. First revaccination for all dogs must be within one year of initial vaccination, regardless of whether the 1-year or 3-year vaccine was given. As required by law, subsequent revaccinations must be given either every year for the 1-year vaccine, or every three years for the 3-year vaccine.

The Canine Vaccine Protocol I Recommend

My protocol is to administer a first round of distemper, parvo and adenovirus (no parainfluenza) before 12 weeks of age, usually around 9 to 10 weeks. I give the second round between 15 and 16 weeks. Two weeks after the second round, I titer to insure the dog has been [immunized and not just vaccinated](#). When it comes to rabies, I prefer to give the first vaccine at six months, and then as required by law, a booster one year later and every three years thereafter.

How to Determine If Your Dog Needs a Non-Core Vaccine

As I mentioned above, I don't typically recommend non-core vaccines, which include bordetella, leptospira, Borrelia burgdorferi (Lyme), canine influenza viruses H3N8 and H3N2 and Crotalus atrox ([western diamond rattlesnake](#)). The AAHA has developed a [Lifestyle-Based Vaccine Calculator](#) to help veterinarians and dog parents determine what non-cores, if any, should be given. In my opinion, each vaccine your dog receives should meet the following criteria:

- First, your dog should be healthy. If he has allergies, endocrine issues, organ dysfunction, cancer (or is a cancer survivor) or another medical issue he's not a candidate to receive vaccines
- The vaccine is for a life-threatening disease (this eliminates most non-cores immediately).
- Your dog has the opportunity to be exposed to the disease.
- The vaccine is considered both effective and safe (most aren't, especially the bacterins).
- Your dog has never had an [adverse reaction to a vaccine](#). Do not vaccinate a pet that has had a previous vaccine reaction of any kind.

If you do vaccinate your pet, ask your holistic veterinarian to provide a homeopathic vaccine detox such as Thuja (a common choice for all vaccines except rabies).

It's also important to realize that several non-core vaccines are only available in combination with other vaccines, some of which are core. I recommend you check with your vet to insure none of the non-core vaccines are being piggy-backed on core vaccines your pet receives.

Unfortunately, most traditional vets do not carry single vaccines, so it's a good idea to ask to see the vaccine vial before assuming your pet is only receiving one agent at a time.

Titer Tests Are Finally Going Mainstream

For the first time ever (to my knowledge), in these latest vaccination guidelines the AAHA admits [titer tests](#) are useful to check a dog's immunity to distemper, parvo and adenovirus. Hallelujah! Per the guidelines:

"Measuring antibody levels (quantitative or qualitative) provides a reasonable assessment of protective immunity against CDV, CPV, and CAV2."

And from the AAHA website page titled "Antibody Testing Versus Vaccination:"

"The demand for and availability of antibody testing (both qualitative and quantitative) for canine vaccine preventable diseases has increased substantially over the past decade."²

And finally, from the pet owner section of the website on the canine vaccination guidelines page:

"Titers, or quantitative antibody testing, can help determine your dog's protection from some diseases. Titer testing can be useful when a dog's vaccination history for distemper, adenovirus, and parvovirus is unknown — a positive result typically means he is considered protected."

However, no test is 100 [percent] accurate, so in areas where these diseases run rampant, your veterinarian may still recommend vaccinating. While titer testing for rabies is available, the law still requires that the dog be vaccinated since this is a fatal, zoonotic (i.e., can be spread to people) disease."³

Interestingly, passionate pet parents and proactive vets in other parts of the world have developed much more progressive titering protocols that I hope one day we can institute in North America. In the Netherlands and Belgium, for instance, many vets titer puppies and kittens before their first vaccines to determine if there are maternal antibodies present.

This allows the animals to receive one perfectly timed vaccine. These animals are titered four weeks later to assure they were adequately immunized.

Integrative vets in this country understand convincing clients to titer once after young animals have received their initial vaccines has taken many years to accomplish. Convincing owners to titer before and after a vaccine is absolutely the best medicine, but may prove to be a difficult protocol to institute for economic reasons.

Let's hope the demand for titer tests continues to increase among pet parents, along with access to affordable testing. The great news is Dr. John Robb has arranged for a rabies, parvo and distemper [titer package for \\$55](#) (that you can submit yourself if your vet won't do it)!

If your own vet isn't offering titers at a reasonable cost, shop around. Any veterinarian truly concerned about the health of pets should happily offer affordable titer testing in lieu of automatic revaccination.