

Paw Prints Sept '06  
Annual visits for your four legged friends  
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Immunizations, vaccinations, "shots," whatever you prefer to call them, are a periodic requirement for our pets and children. In the not too distant past, getting "Fluffy's" shots was *the* reason many people made an annual appointment to bring their four legged, furry children to the veterinarian. So, what are these "shots?"

Vaccinations are meant to stimulate the defense systems so that when a pet may be exposed to a potentially serious infection, the body's internal army is ready to fight off a specific virus or bacterial illness. Usually in the form of an injection, this technology has virtually eliminated the risk of some potentially fatal diseases and has dramatically reduced the frequency and severity of many other previously common illnesses. Boarding and day care facilities, training classes, and some cat or dog show competitions require a minimum set of vaccinations. Laws may require pet Rabies immunization. The more social a pet may be, the greater the exposure to infections and thus, the greater the need for this type of protection.

How often to vaccinate, what to vaccinate for, and what the risks versus the benefits of vaccinations are have been the subject of debate and research in the veterinary profession for the last 15 years. There is no one 'right' answer for our dogs and cats to any of these questions. We have learned in the last 3 years that most adult dogs and cats do not really need an annual Distemper group vaccine to maintain adequate protection. (They *do* still need an annual examination!) New vaccines have been developed, new delivery and testing technologies have become available and more information about possible adverse effects from some vaccines have all been factors to consider in devising the perfect protocols that your veterinarian would like to offer.

We all want the best protection in the safest package for our pets, and that really has to be tailored to the individual patient. The vaccinations recommended for an active family dog going to the lake cottage every other weekend are different than those recommended for a solitary house dog that doesn't require periodic grooming or boarding. The protection recommended for a house cat that never goes outside may be different than the recommendations for a cat that boards, is groomed or shown.

Periodic wellness visits are the key to protecting a pet's health, not just "shots." Vaccinations are only a small part of the services your veterinarian can provide. Yes, "Fluffy" should be seen annually, but may not always need "shots."

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Dr. Pat Mahoney is the owner of American Animal Hospital in Neenah, an AAHA certified pet care clinic. To submit your pet related questions for a future column, go to the email link at [www.ameranimal.com](http://www.ameranimal.com).