

## Vaccinations for Dogs

### Vaccinations for Dogs: A Comprehensive Guide

Vaccinations aren't just for humans—they're crucial for keeping our furry friends safe from serious, sometimes even deadly, diseases. Just like you'd want to protect your loved ones, it's essential to get your dog vaccinated as a puppy and to keep up with regular booster shots throughout their life. If you're unsure about your dog's vaccination needs, just give your vet a call—they're there to help!



### Which Vaccinations Does My Dog Need?

In the UK, every dog should be vaccinated against certain diseases, including:

- **Parvovirus:** This highly contagious illness can lead to severe vomiting and diarrhea, and it can be fatal. After the initial vaccinations, your dog will need a booster every three years.
- **Distemper:** A serious disease that can affect several organs, including the stomach and lungs. Like parvovirus, it requires a booster every three years after the initial course.
- **Infectious Hepatitis:** This virus attacks the liver, kidneys, and eyes and can survive in the environment for up to a year. Expect to boost this vaccine every three years.
- **Leptospirosis:** This bacterial infection can damage vital organs. It's known as Weil's Disease in humans and requires a yearly vaccination after the initial shots.

Additionally, some dogs may need extra vaccines:

- **Kennel Cough:** If your dog regularly mingles with others—like at daycare or during dog events—this vaccination is a good idea. It should be given yearly if your dog is at risk.
- **Rabies:** If you travel outside the UK with your dog, a rabies vaccination is a must. This vaccine is typically administered every one to three years, depending on the type.



## Vaccination Schedule

To ensure your dog is fully protected, they'll need a "primary course" of vaccinations followed by annual boosters:

- **Puppy Vaccinations:** Start when they're about 6 to 8 weeks old, with two injections spaced 2 to 4 weeks apart. Sometimes a third injection is necessary—your vet will guide you on that. Your pup will be fully protected 2 to 4 weeks after the last shot, but they'll need boosters every year thereafter.
- **Adult Boosters:** Adult dogs require a leptospirosis booster every year, along with a distemper, parvovirus, and hepatitis booster every three years. Missing these can leave your pup vulnerable to infectious diseases, which can lead to serious health issues.

## How Do Vaccinations Work?

Vaccinations introduce a tiny, harmless amount of a disease into your dog's system. This trains their immune system to recognise and fight off the disease if they ever come into contact with it again. While no vaccine is 100% foolproof, being vaccinated significantly reduces the risk of severe illness if your dog is exposed to the disease.

### **Can a Vaccinated Dog Still Get Sick?**

Yes, it's possible, but vaccinated dogs have a much lower risk of serious illness. If they do contract a disease they've been vaccinated against, they're likely to have milder symptoms and a better chance of recovery.

### **Vaccinations and Travel**

Planning a trip outside the UK? Make sure your dog is vaccinated against rabies and check the specific entry requirements for your destination—each country has different rules. You'll also need to know what's required for your dog to return to the UK.

### **Titre Testing**

Titre testing is a blood test that checks your dog's immunity levels against diseases they've been vaccinated for. If you're worried about over-vaccinating your dog or if they've had a bad reaction in the past, discuss titre testing with your vet. While it's not a long-term alternative to boosters, it can help determine if your dog still has some immunity to specific diseases.

Remember, titre tests can check levels against parvovirus, hepatitis, and distemper, but not leptospirosis. Your dog will still need to be vaccinated for that disease every year.

### **What Happens at a Vaccination Appointment?**



When you take your dog to the vet for vaccinations, the vet will first perform a health check. They'll look at your dog's teeth, eyes, and listen to their heartbeat to ensure they're in good health. The vaccination is usually administered via a simple injection under the skin on the back of the neck—where your dog won't feel much at all. For kennel cough, it's squirted up their nose.

Feel free to ask your vet any questions while you're there—whether it's about vaccinations or other concerns like flea treatments or dental health. Your vet will also remind you when it's time for the next booster shot, but it's a good idea to note those dates in your own calendar as well.

### **How Much Do Vaccinations Cost?**

Costs can vary widely between vets, so it's best to check with your local practice. Some offer "Pet Care Plans," where you pay a monthly fee covering vaccinations, flea treatments, and even discounts on dental care. Typically, the monthly fee is higher for larger breeds compared to smaller ones.

### **What Are the Possible Side Effects?**

Most dogs won't experience side effects, but mild reactions can happen, usually lasting no more than a day or two. You might notice a low energy level, reduced appetite, or a slight fever. Serious side effects are rare, but if you notice anything unusual, contact your vet immediately.

While there's always some risk with any medication—including vaccines—the chances of serious reactions are much lower than the risks of being unvaccinated.

### **Are Vaccinations Dangerous?**

All vaccinations used by vets in the UK are licensed and undergo rigorous testing before they're approved. They continue to be monitored for safety by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, ensuring they're safe for your pet.

## What If My Puppy or Dog Isn't Vaccinated Yet?



### For Unvaccinated Puppies:

- Keep them off the ground in public areas; carry them instead.
- Avoid socialising them with unvaccinated dogs.
- Don't let new or unknown dogs into your home.
- They can safely play in your garden, as long as no unvaccinated dogs have been there.

### For Unvaccinated Dogs:

If your dog has missed a booster, they may still have some protection for a short while, but they're at risk. Keep them away from other dogs and avoid busy areas until they're fully vaccinated again. Be cautious around places where leptospirosis could be a risk, such as areas with farm animals or stagnant water.

### Are Vaccinations Required by Law?

While there's no legal requirement to vaccinate your dog in the UK, it's strongly recommended for their health and happiness. The only time vaccinations become a legal necessity is if you're traveling with your dog outside the UK—specifically, a rabies vaccination is required.

Taking these steps helps ensure your furry friend stays healthy, safe, and happy throughout their life!