



# PREVENTATIVE CARE: Keep Your Pets Healthy and Happy

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Even though it may sometimes seem expensive, or even unnecessary, preventative pet care – including regular vaccinations, flea and tick protection, and heartworm preventative – is essential. It can actually save you time and money in the long run – and, most importantly, it can save your pet's life. The following general guidelines will help you make sure that you're doing your part to keep your pet healthy, but if you have any questions, check with your veterinarian.

## Vaccine Basics

Puppies and kittens usually need their first shots when they are six to eight weeks old, and your vet will advise you when to make a subsequent appointment for booster shots. In the past, an adult cat or dog would receive the same vaccines year after year, but research has shown that some shots protect animals for longer than a year and may only need to be given every three years. This is something for you and your veterinarian to discuss with your particular pet in mind.

Some pet owners are concerned about vaccine safety for pets, often because of the common myths about human vaccines that make the rounds on the Internet, says Dr. Ann Hill, a veterinarian at Canfield Vet in Pittsford. She reassures

her worried clients that vaccines for pets have been shown to be quite safe.

It's best to get your dog or cat's vaccines at your own vet, and for your vet to see her for regular checkups as well, but if you aren't able to afford shots for your dog or cat, please see the sidebar on the nextpage.

## Which Vaccines Do Dogs & Cats Need?

All dogs should receive these vaccines: rabies virus, canine distemper virus, canine parvovirus, and canine adenovirus-2. Your vet can help you decide whether your dog also needs one or more of the "non-core" vaccines, for example, Lyme disease, leptospirosis, and *Bordetella bronchiseptica*. Dogs' risk of contracting these diseases will vary – for example, some pet owners may vacation with their pooches in regions of the country where certain diseases are more prevalent.

The essential vaccines for cats are rabies, rhinotracheitis (feline herpesvirus-1), panleukopenia (feline distemper), and calicivirus. The "non-core" vaccines are feline leukemia virus and feline immunodeficiency virus (feline AIDS), so check with your vet to see what she recommends to keep your kitty healthy. Keep in mind that outdoor cats are not the only ones who need protection from vaccines –their indoor counterparts do, too. And either way, New York state law

requires you to keep your cat's rabies vaccine current (you'll receive a certificate from the vet's office as proof), just as it does for dogs.

## The Facts About Fleas

Dr. Hill says that flea-allergy dermatitis – a severe allergic reaction to flea bites that causes "hot spots" and other problems – is the most common preventable condition she sees in her furry patients. "People think if their dog has never had fleas, they're never going to," she says – but unfortunately, that's not true. Any animal can get fleas, even if they're only going as far as the patio in the backyard for potty breaks – for example, if a possum, raccoon, chipmunk, or fox with fleas has recently visited your yard, it's easy for one of those fleas to hop right onto your dog. Hill says that another common flea myth is that you don't need to bother with flea control during the winter. However, your dog can easily pick them up from places other pets frequent, such as boarding kennels, grooming salons, and pet stores. Besides flea allergies (which can lead to complications), flea bites can cause other serious problems – they can transmit bartonellosis (a bacterial disease) as well as tapeworms.

As for cats, even indoor-only kitties can be bitten; you can bring fleas home on your clothes, or fleas may already be in your house without you knowing. Talk with your vet about whether oral or topical flea preventatives are right for your pet, and which products she recommends. Dog flea products should never be used on cats, as many are toxic to them.

## Terrible Ticks, Horrible Heartworms

Over the last few years or so, Dr. Hill has seen growing numbers of dogs become infected with tick-borne diseases, she says. Many pet owners think they don't need to worry about ticks after summertime's over, and so they stop using tick control, but that's a mistake. "We see ticks almost every month of the year," she says. Ticks can carry serious diseases that are dangerous to both pets and people: Lyme disease, babesiosis, anaplasmosis, ehrlichiosis, and Rocky Mountain spotted fever. To reduce the risk of tick bites, keep your pet away from woods or tall grasses, keep your grass short and clear of wet leaf piles – and just in case, do a "tick check" daily. Check YouTube for videos on safely removing a tick from your pet. (Try to find one from a vet or similar

source.) Many flea products also prevent ticks; you may not need to add an extra product.

Administering regular heartworm preventative is a key part of pet care – for dogs, and also for cats. "Being an indoor cat doesn't mean you're not going to get heartworm," Hill says. All that needs to happen is for a mosquito infected with the heartworm parasite to find its way into your house and bite your cat. In fact, about a quarter of cats with heartworm disease are indoor-only kitties. Sadly, the medication used to treat heartworm disease in dogs cannot be used on cats (the cat is not a natural host for the parasite, so it affects them very differently) – there is no approved treatment.

Fortunately, there are oral, topical, and (for dogs only) injectable medications to prevent heartworm infection in dogs and cats. Because some of these are also effective against ticks, mites, and internal parasites, ask your vet what she recommends. 

## Local Low-Cost Vaccination Clinics

Free Seasonal Rabies Clinics  
Contact your county's  
Department of Health:

Monroe County (585) 753-5171  
Ontario County (585) 396-4343  
Wayne County (315) 946-5749

Pet\$aver HealthyPet Superstore  
1596 Ridge Road West, Rochester  
(585) 621-0890

PETCO  
Find a store near you at [Petco.com](http://Petco.com)

Rochester Community Animal Clinic  
[www.rochestercommunityanimalclinic.com](http://www.rochestercommunityanimalclinic.com)  
985 Bay Street, Rochester, NY 14609  
(585) 288-0600

VIP Pet Care  
[www.VIPPetCare.com](http://www.VIPPetCare.com)  
1-800-427-7973

