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www.KeepMedia.com**Vexing vaccinations: a tale of too much of a good thing - petcare**[Better Nutrition](#), [May, 2003](#) by [Ann N. Martin](#)<< [Page 1](#) **Continued from page 1.** [Previous](#) | [Next](#)

take the test

Holistic veterinarians can give your pet a titer test, which checks the blood for antibody levels for particular diseases. A titer test doesn't measure immunity, but it does measure antibodies circulating in the system. "Antibody levels may suggest, but not conclusively prove, how much immunity that pet carries against a specific disease," writes Susan Wynn, a holistic veterinarian based in Atlanta. Low levels of antibodies suggest that revaccination may be necessary.

Dogs can be tested for parvovirus, coronavirus, herpesvirus, adenovirus and distemper antibodies using a titer test, although the parvovirus and distemper titers are the ones most commonly used. To test cats for feline leukemia virus and immune deficiency virus, vets check for the presence of the virus itself, not the antibody levels.

Cats should have titer tests for feline panleukopenia, herpesvirus and calicivirus. Rabies antibody level tests, on the other hand, aren't recommended due to the public health implications. Because rabies can be transmitted to humans, owners need assurance that their pets are immune from this disease. Titers for other ailments, however, should be performed on a yearly basis so you can be assured that your pet is protected.

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Although titers aren't perfect indicators of immunity, they are the best tests available to provide owners with some reassurance that their pets are protected and don't need to be revaccinated. Titer tests aren't accepted as a guarantee against disease at international borders, although I have noticed that more kennels and clinics are accepting titer tests as proof that the pet is protected.

Perhaps in the future, titer test results will be accepted by the majority of kennels and clinics, but until that time, I recommend that you have your pet vaccinated no more than once every three years. Clearly, annual vaccinations are causing more harm than good. After all, as parents, we don't have our children vaccinated every year, so why would we do it to our pets?

get the facts

Before you take your pet to the veterinarian for any vaccine, here are some things you should do:

- * Always inquire if your veterinarian follows the protocol of vaccinating every three years.
- * Never vaccinate a puppy or kitten under eight weeks of age. Vaccinations are more stressful on underdeveloped immune systems.
- * Always ask your veterinarian if he or she uses killed virus vaccines or modified live virus (MLV) vaccines. Martin Goldstein, DVM, advises that because killed vaccines are less virulent, "manufacturers boost them with powerful additives to provoke a more sustained immune response." His preference? No vaccines.
- * Never vaccinate a pet that's ill, taking medication or malnourished. Also, don't allow your pets to be vaccinated if they're at the vet's office for any type of surgery.
- * Avoid combination vaccines. Given one at a time, spaced over six to eight weeks, vaccinations are less likely to cause side effects.


Ann Martin has spent her career taking on the pet-health establishment.

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