

Examination and Rabies Vaccine

- Regular examinations are essential to maintaining your pet's health.
- A thorough physical examination checks every major body system.
- Periodic vaccine risk assessments help ensure that your pet is properly immunized against infectious diseases.
- Rabies is a deadly disease that is generally fatal in all species. Vaccination against rabies is required by law in most states.

Why Are Annual Examinations Important?

Regular physical examinations are essential to maintaining your pet's health. A thorough examination checks every major body organ and system.

- **Eyes**—The eyes will be checked for redness, cloudiness, or discharge.
- **Ears**—Many pets suffer from ear infections. Your veterinarian will examine your pet's ear canals for possible signs of an ear problem: debris, waxy buildup, or trauma caused by scratching.
- **Mouth**—Your veterinarian will look in your pet's mouth for signs of dental disease and for broken or missing teeth. If he or she sees any problems, your veterinarian may recommend a thorough dental examination and cleaning for your pet.
- **Respiratory system**—Your veterinarian will listen to your pet's heart and lungs.
- **Digestive system**—Your veterinarian will “palpate” (feel) your pet's abdomen for signs of discomfort and to check that the major organs are the right size and shape.
- **Musculoskeletal system**—Your veterinarian will palpate all your pet's major muscles and bones to check for signs of weakness or pain.
- **Skin and haircoat**—Your veterinarian will check of all your pet's “lumps and bumps.” If anything suspicious is found, a biopsy or lump removal may be recommended.

- **Laboratory tests**—During a routine examination, your veterinarian may also want to take samples of your pet's blood, urine, and feces to obtain additional information about your pet's health or to ensure that specific body systems are functioning properly.

During your pet's examination, your veterinarian will also ask you many questions about your pet's behavior, lifestyle, and health history since your last visit. The answers to these questions will help your veterinarian determine what preventive care recommendations he or she should make in order to help keep your pet healthy. Based on your pet's age, lifestyle, and disease risk, your veterinarian will recommend vaccinations for your pet. In virtually every state, vaccination against rabies is required by law.

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What Is Rabies?

Rabies is a deadly disease caused by a virus that attacks the central nervous system. All warm-blooded animals, including wild animals, dogs, cats, and humans, can get rabies. Once clinical signs appear, rabies is generally fatal. However, the disease is also generally preventable through vaccination.

Rabies remains prevalent in wildlife populations—primarily raccoons, bats, foxes, and skunks. Pets are at risk of contracting the disease from wild animals and potentially transmitting it to humans.

The virus can have an incubation period lasting from days to months. Rabies is usually transmitted through contact with the saliva of an infected animal; most pets and people become infected through a bite wound. An animal's saliva becomes infective

Wellness Care

once the virus has traveled through the animal's nervous system from the initial bite site to reach the brain and, ultimately, the salivary glands. Once the virus enters the salivary glands, the animal can pass the infection to other animals or humans through its saliva. Animals with rabies are referred to as rabid.

Prevention

Because of the potentially serious human health implications, rabies vaccination of dogs is required by law in virtually all states, and many states also require cats to be vaccinated. Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent the disease in animals and, in doing so, to safeguard human health. Today's rabies vaccines are very safe and effective.

Other forms of rabies prevention include:

- Keeping your pet away from wildlife.
- Ensuring that all other dogs or cats your pet comes in contact with are vaccinated.
- Minimizing contact with stray animals. Do not feed stray animals with unknown vaccination status or allow them to remain near your home and pets.

Vaccination helps protect your pet from unnecessary euthanasia or extended quarantine if he or she has contact with a rabid animal. Any pet that bites a person and has an unknown or out-of-date vaccination status may be subject to quarantine or euthanasia, depending on state laws.