



## Holistic Medicine and Vaccines:

### The Good, The Bad, and the Unavoidable Uncertainty of Risk

In the realm of holistic medicine, vaccines tend to be considered part of the problem and not part of the solution. This is contrary to conventional veterinary medicine which relies heavily on vaccinations for preventative medicine. So, what should we believe? Are vaccines helpful or harmful?

Vaccines are divided into two categories:

**Core vaccines** help to prevent severe, life-threatening, and often heartbreaking diseases like Parvo virus, Canine and Feline Distemper virus, and Rabies. Without these vaccines, our pets would be vulnerable to devastating illness and severe suffering. These vaccines also happen to be very good at providing immunity and are likely to be protective for long periods of time. So it makes sense that they should be incorporated into every patient's wellness plan.

**Non-core vaccines** are vaccines for diseases that are either not typically life-threatening, like Kennel Cough and Canine Influenza Virus, or diseases that are at high risk based on a patient's exposure due to location or activity, such as Leptospirosis or Feline Leukemia. These vaccines have short durations of immunity and often need to be boosted annually.

It's easy to want to apply the logic of vaccinating for whatever your pet may be "at risk for", but, unfortunately, there are risks inherent in the vaccination process itself that gives us pause before recommending them:

- Any vaccine can cause a life-threatening anaphylactic reaction. Luckily, this is extremely rare. However, it can occur with any vaccine, regardless of how many times the pet has received the vaccine before.
- Some feline vaccines have been linked to a very rare sarcoma, an aggressive and life-threatening tumor that can form at the injection site. Why the sarcomas form is still uncertain. However, one theory is that it may have to do with the *adjuvant*, which is added to the vaccine to stimulate a local immune response.
- Vaccines may trigger or exacerbate hypersensitivity to non-vaccine antigens. In other words, they may cause or worsen allergies and autoimmune disease.
- Vaccines may cause a transient period of immune suppression.
- Homeopathically, a vaccine is considered a transfer of biological material with its own vibrational energy. Thus, a vaccine has the potential to transfer a pattern of symptoms called a *myasm*. When an animal exhibits a new set of symptoms after receiving a vaccine or multiple vaccines, it is called *vaccinosis*.

For patients with pre-existing chronic health concerns, it may be wise to reconsider vaccinations at all, or at the very least, review the risks of exposure versus the risks of the vaccinations themselves.

Vaccinations are introduced into the body to create an immune and inflammatory response. When we administer a vaccine, it is vital that the patient is healthy enough to mount an effective immune response, and healthy enough to withstand the inflammation we are creating. This is why an examination is critical prior to the introduction of a vaccine into the body. Often, borderline, or subtle inflammation that is already present, will worsen and become a much worse problem in the face of an immune challenge such as a vaccine. These conditions can be difficult to detect, and a physical exam is the best defense against problems.

Since our patients don't talk to us, we rely upon their subtle signals, head and body postures, stiffness, or slight tension when areas are touched, as well as the more overt symptoms such as heart rate, gingival color, respirations, etc., during the exam to guide us as to where to investigate internal problems.

Abnormal responses found during an examination may indicate the need to postpone a vaccine, or discuss options for further diagnostics or therapy.

We believe it is very important to **avoid overvaccinating**, especially pets with chronic inflammatory diseases. In an effort to prevent such chronic disease in our patients we will offer vaccine titers whenever practical. Homeopathic remedies accompany all our vaccines to help our patients create a healthy response to the vaccines we administer. Our vaccines are carefully chosen to be thimerosal/mercury free, and our feline vaccines are adjuvant free.