

# The Importance Of Your Pet's Annual Well Care Visits

## Q. What is the most important part of your pet's "annual vaccines?"

**A.** It's not the vaccines...it's the check up! Contrary to what many believe, while immunization is important, it is by no means the only part or even the most important part of preventive medicine. The annual physical examination that your pet receives is the most important part of keeping your pet healthy because it's the opportunity to find and stop (or at least slow) disease before it becomes serious and expensive.

Darlene Arden is the author of *The Angell Memorial Animal Hospital Book of Wellness and Preventive Care for Dogs* (Angell Memorial Animal Hospital is one of the world's top hospitals of veterinary medicine). According to Arden, "Rather than using stopgap measures to make a pet healthy after the animal has become ill, if you can prevent or catch illness early on, it's easier on the pet, the owner and the pocketbook."

## Q. What does a "check up" consist of?

**A.** Your pet's well care starts with a general physical examination to check for any obvious outward signs of problems, such as weight problems, dental/oral disease, tumors, and heart murmurs. The veterinarian will examine your pet's ears, eyes, face, teeth and mouth, lymph nodes, skin and external genitalia. He will palpate your pet's abdomen to judge organ size, shape, and for the presence of any problems with these organs and he will listen to your pet's chest for presence of heart and lung abnormalities. But this should only be the start because not all diseases are detectable from the outside. To identify some problems, you have to look a little deeper. So, depending on your pet's age, breed, and findings from the physical examination, other tests such as laboratory (blood) profiling may be made to ensure that internal organ systems, such as liver, kidneys, and blood systems, are in good order.

## Q. What about your pet's vaccines?

**A.** Research over the last few years has shown us that not all pets need to be vaccinated against all possible diseases all of the time. Furthermore, this research has shown us that not all vaccinations need to be given yearly as we have done in decades past. The decision to either vaccinate or not vaccinate your pet should not be taken lightly. Vaccines given at the proper age and times will benefit your pet and your veterinarian can help you decide which vaccines are appropriate for your pet and at what frequency they should be given. To help make vaccination decisions that will best serve your pet safely, we will (1) consider your pet's risk of exposure to disease, (2) use vaccines that are licensed for and capable of providing immunity for as long as three years whenever possible, and (3) following the principles of vaccination set forth by the American Veterinary Medical Association, the American Animal Hospital Association, and the American Association of Feline Practitioners. Check out the following links for a brief description of some of the common infectious diseases for which veterinarians vaccinate "routinely."

Canine & Feline: [Rabies](#)

Canine: [Canine Parvovirus](#), [Canine Distemper](#), [Leptospirosis](#), [Bordetella/Kennel Cough](#)

Feline: [Herpesvirus-Calicivirus](#), [Feline Distemper/Panleukopenia](#), [Feline Leukemia](#), [Feline Immunodeficiency Virus](#)

## Q. Do I need to be concerned about parasite prevention?

**A.** Yes, you do! Our pets are vulnerable to a wide variety of parasites with significant health consequences. Very importantly, some of these parasites have potentially dire consequences for humans. Follow these links for information about specific parasites: [Pets, Parasites, and People](#), [Canine & Feline Heartworm Disease](#), [Fleas & Ticks](#), and [Roundworms & Hookworms](#). In Georgia every dog and cat should be on preventive medication for fleas and heartworm disease regardless of lifestyle. Even completely indoor pets are susceptible to these parasites. The need for preventive medications for other parasites depends on each individual pet's risk of exposure to the parasite in question. With the plethora of preventive medications from which to choose, knowing which medication(s) to choose can be a bit of a challenge. Your veterinarian can help you with this very important decision.

## Q. What else does this check up do for me and my pet?

**A.** This also the time to review your pet's dental care; nutritional status, weight issues, and diet; breed specific problems, such as glaucoma in cocker spaniels and heart disease in boxers and Doberman pinschers; and any other concerns you may have had but just hadn't asked about in the past. *Always remember that the only dumb question is the one you didn't ask!*