

TAKE THE TITER TEST

Testing a dog's serum antibody titers can prevent overvaccinating

by
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Taking blood for an annual titer test, to check a dog's level of immune defenses, should replace the habit of vaccinating dogs annually whether or not they need it.

Few issues in veterinary medicine are as controversial as the debate about administering annual vaccinations to our dogs. Long considered part of the standard of baseline, responsible veterinary healthcare, and credited with conquering some of the fiercest canine viral and other infectious diseases, vaccinations now are also suspected of creating vulnerability to illnesses and chronic conditions such as anemia, arthritis, seizures, allergies, gastrointestinal and thyroid disorders, and cancer. As we've previously discussed in numerous articles, few people advocate refraining from the use of vaccinations altogether, but increasing numbers of veterinary experts recommend administering fewer vaccines to our dogs than was suggested in recent years. The current wisdom is to vaccinate our animal companions enough, but not too much. Does this seem a little arbitrary? It could, especially since the veterinary profession lacks complete information about exactly how long the effects of canine vaccines last. (We bet you thought that most vaccines "last" about a year, which is why you are supposed to bring your dog to the vet for more shots every year, right? Well, you're wrong, and we'll explain why below.) Fortunately, there is a tool that veterinarians and dog owners can use to determine whether or not a dog really needs further vaccination at any given time. It's called a "titer test," and it's readily available, not terribly expensive, and offers multiple advantages over the practices (intentional or not) of over-vaccination and under-vaccination. To understand what a titer test is and what it can do for you and your dog, you need a little background information about vaccinations and their use in this country.

History of "recommended vaccine schedules"

As lifesaving vaccines for various canine diseases have been developed over the last 50 years, veterinarians and dog owners gladly embraced them. Many diseases were prevented, and a new industry was born. Like any industry, it soon set about making itself indispensable. Increasingly, veterinarians