

regionally based and not a significant threat to the general canine population, so only dogs in a high-risk environment need titer testing for Lyme. Dr. Dodds emphasizes that titer testing is not a "guess" at immunological response in a dog; when dealing with CDV and CDP, there is absolute correlation between certain high titer values and what is frequently referred to as "protection" from the diseases in question. In this case, the animal's owner and veterinarian can feel quite confident that the animal possesses sufficient resources for fighting off a disease challenge. When the tests reveal that the animal has borderline or low titer values, the owner and veterinarian should consider revaccinating and then testing the titers again. It may turn out that the animal simply needed a booster to stimulate a stronger immune response. Or, maybe the people involved learn that the animal lacks the ability to respond normally to vaccines, that is, by mounting a proper immune response. In this case, the owner and veterinarian have gained very valuable information about the dog's compromised immune status - information they never would have gained by simply vaccinating and assuming the dog was "protected" as is usually the case with healthy dogs. As you can see, in reality, simply administering vaccines to dogs every year is more of a guessing game than using titer tests to learn about the dog's immune competence. Studies worldwide support titer test results as comprehensive information about a dog's immunological response capabilities.

Now more affordable

Because the more widely recognized benefits of titer testing have caused an increase in the number of titer tests performed at veterinary laboratories, the price is coming down and the tests are available from a wide range of providers. Veterinary laboratories offer traditional vaccine titer testing by looking at a blood sample from a dog and identifying a specific level of actual immunity in the dog. Reputable laboratories use commonly accepted immunological techniques that have been validated against original test techniques and found to be accurate. Be certain your veterinarian sends blood samples to a major professional veterinary laboratory such as Antech Diagnostics (www.antechdiagnostics.com), Idexx Laboratories (www.idexx.com), Vita-Tech Laboratories (www.vita-tech.com), or one of the major university veterinary laboratories, including Cornell, Colorado State, Michigan State, Tufts, and Texas A&M. In early spring 2002, Synbiotics Corporation, a San Diego-based manufacturer of diagnostic materials and instrumentation for the veterinary market, rolled out an innovative tool that should make titer testing even more readily available and affordable. TiterCHEK™ is the first in-office titer test licensed by the USDA for use in veterinary clinics. TiterCHEK™ tests titers for canine parvovirus and canine distemper virus, registering the degree of strength of the immune response in varying color shades. If the test results denote a weak immune response level, blood samples can be sent to a veterinary laboratory for more comprehensive testing. Dr. Dodds estimates that more than 95 percent of in-office tests will indicate a satisfactory immune response present in a dog that has received its puppy vaccinations and one-year boosters, so follow-up is rarely required. Expect to pay your veterinarian from \$40 to \$100 for CDV and CPV titer testing from a laboratory, and slightly less for an in-office test, for which your veterinarian must purchase the TiterCHEK™ test kit.

Resisting vaccine titer testing

As practicing clinicians, veterinarians are hesitant to adjust any clinical regimen they have adopted until they see research study data that they judge to be functional and applicable in the real world. Many veterinarians resisted rethinking the annual canine vaccine regimen based upon the early findings of researchers. However, the increased evidence linking over-vaccination to acute and chronic diseases in