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## VACCINATION OF COMPANION ANIMALS

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Vaccination has provided the single greatest contribution to the health of our pets over recent decades and is necessary if we want to prevent major epidemics of the diseases that vaccination is designed to prevent.

Our one priority, as trained and responsible Veterinary Surgeons, is the health and welfare of the animals that visit our practice. As such, we are duty bound to adhere to the best scientific information available to us at any given time.

The Veterinary Products Committee (VPC), an independent, expert advisory group, reporting to and advising both the licensing authority and the Government, has emphasised the safety and value of vaccination and presented data on the extremely low prevalence of adverse reactions to vaccinations in dogs and cats. In addition to this an independent study by the Animal Health Trust in Newmarket recently produced the clearest evidence yet that there is no deleterious association between routine vaccination and signs of ill health in companion animals.

The VPC recommended that at this time there is insufficient justification to alter current data sheet recommendations for companion animal vaccines.

As Veterinary Surgeons we must ensure that as many of the animals under our care as possible are fully protected against killer diseases such as parvovirus, hepatitis, distemper and leptospirosis. We also use vaccination to protect against the severely debilitating and potentially fatal diseases such as cat flu (calici and herpes viruses) and feline leukaemia virus.

We still do not know enough about the true duration of immunity in individual animals but we do know enough to be able to say that not all vaccinations necessarily provide lifelong immunity. In this practice alone in the last year we have seen examples of animals that have missed booster vaccinations contracting diseases such as leptospirosis and feline leukaemia.

The degree and duration of immunity can vary greatly between different individuals and many external factors also have to be taken into account. Without actually testing the immune status of the animal for every disease on a regular basis, we cannot know the level of immunity it possesses. This testing is possible but it incurs extra expense to you as a pet owner and may well serve only to demonstrate that your animal does require a vaccination. Our Veterinary Surgeons can discuss this issue with you if you wish.

Given the proven safety of companion animal vaccines and in the light of the best scientific evidence presented to veterinary practitioners in this country from independent bodies such as the VPC, the British Veterinary Association reported on the 1st April 2006 that it sees no reason to change vaccination policies at this time.

We hope that this leaflet allows you to make an informed decision about having your pets vaccinated and explains to you why we feel at present we should not vary from the legal requirement to follow data sheet recommendations, that animals receive an annual booster vaccination.

Should new information appear that proves otherwise, then our profession bodies will respond accordingly and Calweton Vets will advise you of any changes.