

MERCHANT'S MARKETER

OF SW FLA

Pet Points To Ponder

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This month I would like to discuss some things that I think are EXTREMELY important to pet owners and, perhaps more aptly put, to our pets themselves. The first is what I consider to be one of the most frequently misunderstood aspects of veterinary care, the initial puppy or kitten vaccination series. I cannot tell you how many times a year I see clients who bring in their new six and eight week old puppies or kittens confidently stating to me that the pet has already had "...all it's vaccinations!" Well, not if the pet is actually going to be protected from what it is that we do vaccinate for, has it had "all it's vaccinations."

Another common scenario is the puppy or kitten of the same age bracket that is brought in with paperwork documenting having had two or three vaccines already in its life. REALLY?! I can only cringe and hope that the client will listen to what I have to say to them regarding such misfortune, and try to make it right. So for those of you who would like to have the initial

vaccine protocol demystified, here it goes.

Assuming the mother of the puppy or kitten in question was herself protected by immune proteins (antibodies) against the common diseases for which we vaccinate, and assuming said puppy or kitten had a good drink of mom's milk the day it was born, we may also assume that those antibodies were then absorbed through the intestinal lining and ready and willing to help guard against the agents from which they were formed in the first place. Confused? Well, look at it this way. If the mom had been either vaccinated for or had perhaps survived (rare) a bout of canine distemper virus infection, she would develop antibodies against the virus which are circulating in her blood stream. These antibodies will also be found in her milk at the time of whelping (giving birth), and although there is actually a limited window of opportunity, if the pups drink some of that milk after being born, they will be able to absorb

those antibodies into their own blood streams. This phenomenon is called "passive immunity." The protection is essentially borrowed.

If the canine distemper virus were to somehow invade the body of one of the pups, the pup now has some of the borrowed antibodies from the mom to essentially handcuff the virus and render it unable to perpetuate the destruction it is known to create. This is an amazing biological and immune phenomenon. The problem is, it doesn't last forever. These potentially lifesaving antibodies will begin to break down over time, and by the time the puppy is sixteen weeks old or so, they will have essentially disappeared. This is a key fact in this discussion. We'll get back to it.

Now—here's another phenomenon that we have to deal with. When we begin vaccinating puppies and kittens, we are asking their immune systems to respond to the components of our vaccine and begin producing those coveted antibody proteins of their own. This is known as "active immunity." The timing here however is a little tricky. If an animal is too young for its immune system to have developed enough at that point to actually muster a response to the vaccine, it will not



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happen. What will happen however is that some of those protective borrowed antibodies will scout out some of the proteins from the vaccine and handcuff them. As a result, a percentage of the borrowed antibodies protecting the animal at the present time is being permanently taken out of commission, leaving far less of those antibodies available to protect should the need arise. What's worse is the fact that the animal's own too immature immune system is not yet able to respond to whatever part of the vaccine escaped being handcuffed.

Bottom Line? If you begin the vaccine series too early, you actually may DECREASE the pet's immunity instead of increasing it!