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that provides protection for 3 years against parvovirus, canine adenovirus and distemper. These are the potentially fatal diseases that dogs have been vaccinated against for many years.

The other disease that our pet dogs are routinely vaccinated against is Kennel Cough, or infectious tracheo-bronchitis. Whilst this is not usually a fatal disease, it does cause a nasty cough. It is also highly contagious in kennel and hospital situations, hence its name. Vaccination for this disease is essential if you wish to board your dog at any time.

Research into kennel cough has shown that annual vaccination is definitely required to confer the best protection. In some instances, biannual vaccination is appropriate, and indeed required by some boarding establishments in order to minimize outbreaks.

So how can we know exactly how often we should be vaccinating our pets? The short answer is that ultimately we must rely on the vaccine manufacturer's recommendations. They have performed the studies necessary. There are blood tests that can be performed to measure the antibody levels in the blood against a certain disease. Some have advocated using these tests to determine whether an animal needs to be revaccinated. This approach however is fraught with potential problems. The immune system and its response to disease is an incredibly complex and not fully understood phenomenon. These blood tests may not accurately predict immunity from disease.

The only way to determine the immunity of an animal against a disease is to expose the animal to the disease and see if it is protected. As this is not something we would do with our pets, we must rely on the recommendations provided to us by the vaccine makers.

Ultimately, there is no "one size fits all" approach to vaccinating our pets. Your veterinarian can advise you of what is the most appropriate for your pet given the circumstances. What is certain, is that the benefits of vaccinating far outweigh any risks. Furthermore, irrespective of whether your pet is vaccinated annually or every 3 years, it is vital that your pet has a thorough physical exam either yearly or twice yearly to ensure good health and detect disease early.

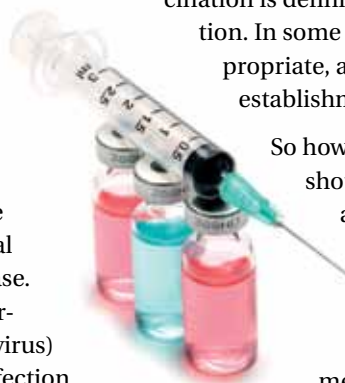
The advent of vaccines has been one of the single most important medical advances that has contributed to improving the health of people and animals. Smallpox, a deadly and contagious disease has been eradicated from people as a consequence of vaccination. In dogs, diseases such as parvovirus and distemper are now uncommon due to wide-spread vaccination.

Veterinarians who were in practice in 1978\* when the worldwide epidemic caused by canine parvovirus emerged tell horror stories of hospital wards full of dogs dying from this dreadful disease. Thankfully, dogs that are immunised against parvovirus (as well as distemper and canine adenovirus) have a very high degree of protection against infection.

Most pet owners are quite happy if the only reason for a trip to the vet is for the annual vaccination and check up. Whilst at face value this routinely performed procedure seems simple and straightforward, there are many complex issues for veterinarians to address when vaccinating companion animals. One of these issues is the frequency of vaccination required to provide protection against the diseases we are vaccinating against.

It has been accepted practice to vaccinate animals annually since the development of vaccines for companion animals in the 1950's. These early vaccines were quite crude, but still effective. It was found through experience that annual revaccination provided continuing protection against these infectious diseases. However, until recently little or no research had been done to determine how long immunity really lasts, and whether booster vaccinations can be given at intervals longer than 12 months.

Advances in vaccine development have resulted in vaccines that are safer and more effective. Furthermore, research has confirmed that following vaccination with certain types of vaccine, immunity persists for at least 3 years. There is now a commercially available vaccine



\* The author was a little boy in 1978.