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ANNUAL PET VACCINATIONS MAY BE UNNECESSARY, FATAL

Date: October 1, 2002

Subject(s): Science and technology

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- [Minnesota IssueWatch](#) (Web site) | [Report details](#)
- [Some vets question annual boosters](#) (www.msnbc.com) | [Cite details](#)

Evidence is growing that annual vaccination of dogs and cats may not be necessary and may cause harmful side effects. Last year the American Veterinary Medical Association acknowledged that annual vaccinations are based on precedent and not on scientific data.

In cats there has been a large increase in hyperthyroidism and cancerous tumors between the shoulder blades where vaccines typically are injected. There are more health problems in dogs, such as autoimmune disease, for which there is no explanation. Some veterinarians think over-vaccination may cause dogs to produce antibodies against their own tissue.

Studies at several universities suggest that protection from vaccines may last for years. The USDA tests vaccines to make sure they protect pets, usually for one year. The tests do not look for long-term side effects or how long protection lasts. Vaccine makers do not test duration, saying it would be expensive and require isolating large numbers of animals for an extended time. Pfizer found its one-year rabies vaccine lasted for at least three years, and now sells the same formula under different labels to meet different state requirements.

Most states mandate rabies vaccinations every three years, but some states, cities and counties require them annually due to local problems with rabies in wild animals. Most veterinarians and vaccine makers have traditionally recommended annual booster shots for distemper, parvovirus, herpesvirus and other diseases. These vaccines are not required by law because the diseases are not a threat to people.

Some veterinarians are reducing the number of vaccines they give. "My own pets are vaccinated once or twice as pups and kittens, then never again except for rabies," said Ronald D. Schultz, chairman of the University of Wisconsin's Department of Pathobiological Sciences.

Minnesota note: **Note: This information was flagged as no longer accurate on 5-24-2005** All dogs and cats are required by state law to be vaccinated against rabies, with primary vaccination at three months. Rabies vaccines must be licensed by the USDA and are repeated every one to three years, depending on the type of vaccine used and the municipality. Most dogs and cats receive a number of other vaccines annually. (Sources: Minnesota Rules 1705.1146 and PetCARE Information Center at the University of Minnesota)

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