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Millions wasted on needless jabs for pets, say vets

By David Derbyshire, Science Correspondent
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Pet owners are wasting millions of pounds each year on unnecessary booster vaccinations for cats and dogs, it was claimed yesterday.

More than 30 vets have signed an open letter stating that many vaccines for life-threatening diseases last for many years and sometimes provide life-long immunity.

That made the annual boosters recommended by the manufacturers of vaccines unnecessary, they said.

But the vets' professional body rejected the claims and warned that animals would suffer if their owners neglected regular jabs.

Many vets send letters each year to pet owners, reminding them to update their animals' vaccinations. A single booster injection can cost between £20 and £40.

The letter, published in the *Veterinary Times*, claims that the original vaccines for many diseases, including distemper, cat flu and parvovirus, last for many years.

Recent American research states "there is no proof that many of the yearly vaccinations are necessary and that protection in many instances may be life-long".

It said that some vaccines could cause "adverse events", including allergic reactions and cancer in cats. Vets stress the importance of vaccinations in preventing disease but called for boosters to be given every three years.

"Those who continue to give annual vaccinations in the light of the new evidence may well be acting contrary to the welfare of the animals committed to their care."

However animals should be examined by vets every year.

But vaccine manufacturers said they recommended yearly boosters because they could not prove that all animals received long-term immunity.

David Sutton, a spokesman for Intervet, a veterinary drug manufacturer, said: "We base our recommendations on the science and the science tells us that we don't know how long immunity lasts in individual animals."

The British Small Animal Veterinary Association said the letter did not represent the views of most vets but that of a minority who had "sympathies with homeopathic medicine. Vaccination has provided the single greatest contribution to the health of our pets over recent decades.

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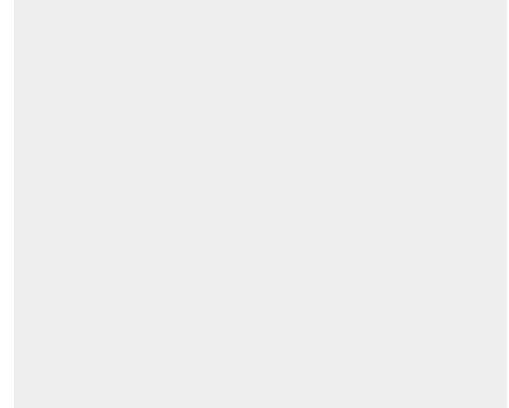
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