



American Animal Hospital

Caring for your pets as if they were our own.

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Preventative Health Care for your Dog

The Physical Exam

An annual physical exam is even more important than vaccines in maintaining the health of your pet. At the start of the exam, we will ask a number of questions about your pet's medical history, diet, medications and supplements, etc. This is your opportunity to voice any concerns you have about how your pet has been doing. Then we perform a systematic examination of your entire pet to be certain that there are no subtle changes that can indicate early disease processes. All of this information is combined to arrive at a complete assessment of your furry friend's health status. Finally, a plan of action is formulated – with your input – to correct any problems and help you maintain the comfort and health of you pet. Remember, you are part of your pet's health care team and your input is important!

Fecal Exam for Intestinal Parasites

A small sample of your pet's stool should be examined at least yearly to detect the presence of intestinal parasites. Dogs with more exposure to parasites (drinking out of lakes & ponds, hunting, etc) should have a fecal exam every 6 months. Although intestinal worms are large enough to see with the naked eye, they are typically not shed in the feces. Their eggs and the many single-celled parasites are too small to be seen without a microscope, so owners often have no idea their pet is infected. When you drop off a fecal sample, it is dissolved in water, centrifuged, and mixed with a special solution which helps to separate out parasites and parasite eggs. It is then examined under a microscope to identify any parasites present so that appropriate treatments can be administered.

Heartworm Test & Monthly Preventatives

Heartworm is a potentially deadly parasite transmitted by mosquitoes and we see cases of heartworm every year in the Valley. Once in the body, the parasite migrates to the heart and main arteries to the lungs, reducing blood flow and eventually causing heart failure. Our in-house screening test requires just a small blood sample and results are typically available within the hour. Current recommendations from the American Heartworm Society (www.heartwormsociety.org) are to test dogs at approximately one year of age and annually thereafter. Since it takes up to 6 months for the parasite larvae to mature to the point where testing is accurate, testing of puppies is not necessary. The monthly preventatives (such as Sentinel or Interceptor®) are very safe and effective against heartworm, as well as treating three intestinal worms: roundworm, hookworm and whipworm. We recommend year-round monthly prevention to maintain the best coverage for your pet against all of these parasites.

Distemper Group Vaccine

The distemper group vaccine protects against a core group of infectious – and sometimes fatal – diseases. The name comes from one component, the Canine Distemper Virus, which causes severe upper respiratory and neurological disease. Additional components are Parvovirus, which causes hemorrhagic diarrhea and bone marrow suppression; Adenovirus-2, which causes viral hepatitis; and Parainfluenza Virus, which is one of the viruses at the root of the “Kennel Cough Complex”. This vaccine is safe and effective when professionally administered, and should not cause significant discomfort to your pet. The distemper combo is boosted at 1yr of age, and every three years thereafter to maintain adequate protection. Owners that are concerned about over-vaccination are welcome to discuss performing vaccine titers, which measure the level of protective antibody for each of these serious diseases.

Bordetella (“Kennel Cough”) Vaccine

“Kennel Cough” is a bronchitis-like infection which is typically caused by one of several different viruses and bacteria in combination. The two most common viruses involved (Parainfluenza Virus and Adenovirus) are covered by the distemper combo vaccine and the bordetella vaccine covers the most common bacterial culprit: *Bordetella bronchiseptica*. This disease complex is highly infectious and transmitted through respiratory secretions (sneezing, coughing, etc). For this reason it is required by boarding and grooming facilities, and **STRONGLY RECOMMENDED** for dogs that visit a groomer, attend training classes, field trials, or shows, or go to the dog park. We also require vaccination for hospitalized pets such as surgery patients. This vaccine may be given either as an injection or intranasally (nose drops) and needs to be boosted at least annually (some dog shows & boarding facilities may require vaccination every 6 months).

Leptospirosis Vaccine

Leptospirosis is another bacterial infection and is spread through the urine of infected animals. Water and soil may harbor this organism for weeks, so you may not be aware of the exposure. More importantly, this disease may be transmitted from pets to owners and can be life-threatening. Once in the body, the bacteria can attack the liver, the kidneys, or both; additional symptoms include fever, joint pain, depression and loss of appetite. Although dogs with an “outdoorsy” lifestyle (hunting, hiking, drinking out of ponds & creeks, etc) are most at risk, we have diagnosed leptospirosis in city dogs that have never left their yards. Due to the seriousness of this disease, we strongly recommend annual vaccination of all dogs.

Rabies Vaccine

Most people are aware of this highly fatal viral disease, which destroys the nervous system. It can affect all warm-blooded species and is transmissible from pets to people through bites or saliva-contamination of other wounds. Rabies is required by state and municipal law in Wisconsin for all dogs, and must be given by a licensed veterinarian. It is boosted at 1yr of age and every 3 years thereafter.

Lyme Vaccine – Optional

Lyme disease is becoming increasingly common in our area, and we frequently will find deer ticks on our patients. Your dog does not need to go “up north” camping or hunting to be exposed to deer ticks, but these activities do increase the risk. Lyme disease is caused by a specialized bacterium (*Borrelia burgdorferi*) which is resistant to many common antibiotics. We do not typically see the “bull’s-eye” skin lesions like in people, but dogs do experience the fever, joint pain, depression, and, in rare cases, kidney failure. For dogs with a high risk of tick contact, we recommend annual vaccination for Lyme disease. Since ticks can carry diseases besides Lyme, we also recommend monthly use of topical Frontline® as additional protection (see below).

Flea & Tick Preventative – Optional

Recent technology offers us several safe and effective options to protect your pet from flea and tick infestations. The best option for your pet depends on your lifestyle, but for most dogs we recommend monthly use of Frontline® throughout the season. Tick prevalence varies somewhat with the weather each year, but a general rule of thumb is to use a topical from March or April through the first hard frost (November or December). There is often a second “hatch” of ticks in the late fall – just in time for hunting season – so be sure your dogs are protected!

Wellness Testing – Optional

Wellness testing, which typically includes blood and urine analysis, is a valuable addition to the physical exam. In young, healthy pets wellness testing gives us important baseline information. Since many tests have a range of what is considered “normal,” having baseline values means that we can pick up on small changes in organ function sooner and begin treatment before the problem snowballs into something more serious. Many pets are very good at masking symptoms of disease – by the time they stop eating and look sick, they are often very, very ill. Wellness testing helps us find the problems before they progress far enough to make your pet miserable.

Our Health Care Team

Our team is here to give you as much information as you need to make the best decisions for you and your pet. We continually attend educational seminars and conferences to make sure that we have the latest information to be able to answer your questions and best meet the needs of your furry family. Use us as your first resource – we want to help keep your pet healthy and happy!

