



Animal Clinic of Michigan City

Canine Vaccinal Titer

With the advent of preventative medicine, one of the biggest questions looming over our heads is whether annual vaccines are a necessity. Those who don't vaccinate at all must accept the risk that their furry friends will catch a preventable infectious disease and possibly die. Those who over-vaccinate must accept the risks of side effects such as vaccine reactions and chronic diseases. In the middle are those that try to vaccinate as needed, thus the canine vaccinal titer, which measures the body's response to vaccination, comes into effect. Before the 1970's veterinarians were taught that annual vaccinations were not necessary and it was not until vaccine manufacturers advocated annual boosters that it took hold. In fact, there is no scientific justification that annual vaccinations are completely necessary. The only scientific proof that has come in the last 30 years is by vaccine manufacturers that their vaccines will give a one-year duration of immunity.

The age-old philosophy of annual vaccinations for all diseases leads to many complications. Most complications have a very slow onset and may not show up for years. Evidence points to the body creating antibodies to its own cells with over-vaccination. This can lead to diseases such as bone marrow failure, seizures, thyroid disease, adrenal disease, kidney and liver failure, allergies and skin infections, and even arthritis. All of these diseases worsen quality of life and can lead to or even result in early death.

Annual vaccines do not always stimulate the immune system. If our friends are appropriately vaccinated and have immunity to the disease, then there will not be an added stimulation by an additional vaccine. You cannot make an immune dog more immune with additional vaccinations; much like you cannot turn an off switch more off. Re-vaccinating an already immune dog has little to no benefit and may be detrimental. If they are already immune then the body de-activates the vaccine and makes it useless, thus there is no booster effect. By re-stimulating the immune system with an unneeded vaccine, we may also cause our dog's own body to attack itself, in the case of autoimmune hypothyroidism.

We have seen that distemper and parvo vaccines may have a longer duration in most dogs than just one year, we just are unsure of exactly how long it is. Every dog is different and his or her body will respond differently, so every dog will have a different duration. That is why running an annual vaccinal titer is important to determine if their body is still able to ward off these diseases. If the titer levels are too low then we need to booster the shots; but if it is high enough, then we know they are still protected. Some of our pets have protective immunity of up to 5-8 years and titering is the only way to determine that.

Giving a Rabies vaccination is a matter of state law. Thankfully, we are able to administer the Rabies vaccine once every 3 years, after their first booster.