

FloriDachs Miniature Dachshunds – What are Titters?

To understand titers, one must understand a bit about the immune system.

The immune system's job is to recognize the difference between "self" and "foreign." Self consists of anything that belongs in the blood or tissues of the body. Foreign consists of anything, such as viruses, bacteria, fungi, and non-living debris or material that does not belong in the blood or tissues of the body.

When something foreign enters the blood or tissues of the body, the immune system reacts. The first step is to identify the foreign thing, and then to produce antibodies to it. This process can take many days or weeks. Once antibodies are produced, they bind to the foreign thing. Cells in the immune system are then able to recognize the antibody-bound thing and kill it or digest and remove it. It is by this process that we maintain order in the body...

As a lead in to the article, Dr. Patrick Mahaney, a well-known holistic veterinarian had the following to say regarding Karen Becker's article:

"I always enjoy sharing the perspective of likeminded fellow veterinarians and other pet-industry writers. Prevention of illness resulting from vaccinations is particularly close to me, as my own dog Cardiff suffers from immune-mediated disease (Immune Mediated Hemolytic Anemia) potentially correlating with vaccinations. Such is why I recommend performing antibody titers, like Spectrum Labs' VacciCheck (<http://vaccicheck.com/>) before giving your dog a Distemper combination (DA2PP) vaccination simply because the manufacturer's recommended booster time has come and you've gotten that "Vaccinations Due" card in the mail from your veterinarian. Check out this excellent article from Dr. Karen Becker for Mercola".

Titer Test: Safer for Your Pet Than Routine Vaccines, and at an Affordable Cost

Dr. Karen Becker

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Recently, I ran across an ABC News article titled “Dog Owners Wade Into Vaccine Debate,” which caught my interest, especially since August has been designated “National Immunization Awareness Month” by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA).

I am all for immunization awareness, but I am not sure what the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has in mind. I suspect it might have to do with reminding pet guardians to comply with the latest re-vaccination guidelines, thereby insuring that dogs and cats are repeatedly and in most cases unnecessarily subjected to the viruses, chemicals, adjuvants, and other potential toxins contained in vaccines.

But anyway... back to the ABC News article. The reporter who wrote the piece interviewed a man with three dogs, and starts off by saying the owner “refuses” to vaccinate them, which is not accurate. Reading a little further, it is clear the owner does not refuse to vaccinate – he refuses to **RE-vaccinate** for anything other than rabies, a vaccine that, as we all know, is required by law.

The man being interviewed, Rodney Habib, feels that repeated immunizations do more harm than good, and since he provides his dogs with puppy shots – core vaccines against distemper, parvovirus, and adenovirus (infectious hepatitis) – he believes they will remain immune for years, if not for life.

Mr. Habib Is Part of a Pet Owner Movement Against Over-Vaccination

If you are a regular reader here, you know that I applaud Mr. Habib’s approach to vaccinating his dogs, and his approach is also in line with Schultz’s recommended canine vaccination protocol. For those of you who may be unfamiliar with him, Dr. Schultz is a pioneer and renowned expert in the field of veterinary vaccines. He’s currently involved in the [Rabies Challenge Fund](#), the purpose of which is to determine the duration of immunity conveyed by rabies vaccines, with the goal of extending the required interval for rabies boosters to five and then to seven years.

The only thing Dr. Schultz and I would add to Mr. Habib's protocol is **titters**, run at about two weeks post-vaccination (no sooner) to insure his dogs responded to the vaccines (meaning the vaccinations resulted in immunity against those three specific diseases).

Habib also tells the ABC News reporter that he feels booster shots (in this case, re-vaccinations for distemper, parvo and adenovirus) expose dogs to the same pathogens over and over again, which raises the risk for immune disorders. This is a concern most of us in the holistic veterinary community share. While most conventional veterinarians do not acknowledge a link between autoimmune diseases and vaccines, holistic vets have long voiced alarm over the cause-and-effect relationship between certain vaccines and the subsequent development of autoimmune disorders in pets.

Holistic veterinarians are also concerned about [vaccinosis](#), which is a chronic reaction to not only the altered virus contained in vaccines, but also to the chemicals, adjuvants, and other components of tissue culture cell lines – as well as possible genetic changes – that can be induced by vaccines.

Author of the foremost handbook of holistic health care for pets, ***Dr. Pitcairn's Complete Guide to Natural Health for Dogs & Cats***, [Dr. Richard Pitcairn](#), who also holds a Ph.D. in immunology, defines it this way: "Vaccinosis is to be understood as the disturbance of the vital force by vaccination that results in mental, emotional, and a physical change that can, in some cases, be a permanent condition."

Why Does Any Veterinarian Advocate Re-Vaccinating Over a Simple Blood Test to Determine If Another Vaccination Is Necessary?

To present an opposing view to Mr. Habib's, the ABC News reporter also asked a veterinarian, Dr. Kate Berger at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Veterinary Medicine, for her viewpoint on re-vaccinations. Predictably, Dr. Berger asserted that adverse reactions to vaccines are both rare and quite mild when they do occur. *"Abnormal responses occur so infrequently, and more unvaccinated animals die from the diseases the vaccines prevent, that the benefit of vaccination outweighs the minimal risk of the abnormal immune response,"* Berger said.

This is the standard response from the conventional veterinary community. What they always fail to mention is that if an abnormal response does not occur immediately following a vaccination, they make no connection between the vaccine and the response, thus their conclusion that abnormal responses occur

“infrequently.” However, in my experience, it can often take weeks or much longer for a vaccine-related autoimmune disorder to express itself. (Example: my patient [Myra Moonbeam](#).)

While it’s certainly true that unvaccinated animals die from the diseases vaccines prevent, “unvaccinated” animals are typically those that have NEVER been vaccinated – not dogs and cats that have received appropriately timed puppy or kitten shots.

What I can’t understand is why any member of the veterinary community would EVER risk an adverse vaccine reaction – or choose to inject potentially toxic materials into a patient – when there’s a very simple way (titers) to determine if an animal has maintained adequate immunity from a previous vaccination (or in some cases, previous exposure to the disease itself).

The False ‘Herd Immunity’ Argument

Next, the ABC News reporter talked with Dr. Michael Cavanaugh of the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA). The AAHA and similar groups within the traditional veterinary community recommend giving core vaccines once every three years “to maintain a minimum threshold of disease-fighting antibodies.”

Per Dr. Cavanaugh, “*We need as many dogs and cats vaccinated as possible to build up a herd immunity against diseases.*” This assertion stems from the theory that “a critical mass of vaccinated animals will help protect those that aren’t vaccinated.”

This theory makes perfect sense – the more immunized pets there are, the less opportunity there is for unvaccinated animals to be exposed to disease. What does not make sense is the idea that re-vaccinating IMMUNE animals helps in any way to increase herd immunity. All re-vaccinating does is cause potential harm to already vaccinated pets – it does NOT make them “healthier” for purposes of herd immunity.

Individual Exposure Risk: Another False Argument for Automatic Re-Vaccination

The ABC News reporter goes on to point out that there are studies suggesting that certain vaccines can provide immunity against a disease for up to seven years – but not for every animal in every circumstance. According to Dr. Berger of UPenn, vaccination schedules should be based on an animal’s age, size, health, and lifestyle. She also adds that pets who frequent dog parks, doggy daycares and kennels “should probably be vaccinated more often.”

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It is absolutely true that each individual animal responds differently to vaccinations, and it's also true that some pets' lifestyles provide more opportunities for exposure to disease. But, once again I must ask, why automatically vaccinate when you can titer instead to determine a pet's immunity to diseases for which he's already been vaccinated?

In my experience, it is a whole lot safer to replace re-vaccination schedules with routine titer testing. Further, if a re-vaccination is actually necessary based on titer results, it should be given in a single (vs. combo) shot to address ONLY the disease for which there is insufficient immunity.

Antibody Titer Tests Can Be Expensive, So Make Sure to Shop Around

Toward the end of the ABC News piece, Dr. Cavanaugh of the AAHA concedes that titer tests are safe and effective, but predictably, he also contends that vaccines are safe and effective, too. He then points out that titer tests must be repeated every one to three years (which mirrors the [2011 guidelines](#) for re-vaccination), and warns that titer tests “can cost up to four times as much as vaccines.”

Cavanaugh is right about the exorbitant cost of titer tests at some veterinary practices, and in my opinion, it is an outrage. There is absolutely no reason the cost of a simple antibody blood test for distemper or parvo should be prohibitive. I have heard dog owners complain that their vet charges \$200-\$350 for a distemper/parvo vaccine titer test, which is ridiculous, not to mention it seems designed to “inspire” pet owners to choose re-vaccination over titering.

If you are interested in titer tests for your pet and your vet's cost seems high, I encourage you to call around to other practices in your area. The friend of mine who got a \$200 quote from her regular vet was able to find another local practice that charged around \$70 for a titer test. A reasonable cost for a blood draw and distemper/parvo titer test should be around \$70-\$100, depending on where the blood is sent and how (samples sent overnight obviously cost more). As a point of reference, [Hemolife Diagnostics](#), owned by Dr. Jean Dodds, charges \$52 for the distemper/parvo titer test, which is run from a blood sample any vet can send in.

There is also the [VacciCheck](#) antibody test kit that veterinary practices can use to measure antibody titers for canine distemper, parvo, and infectious hepatitis (adenovirus) in a single blood draw samples can be sent out to the lab that manufactures the test, or even better, there's an in-clinic test that returns results in around 20 minutes, and can cost as little as \$20. Veterinarians willing to use the in-clinic test can confirm their patients' immunity in a single office visit.

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Whatever the cost, in my experience, pet owners who titer feel it's money well spent to avoid subjecting their furry companions to unnecessary vaccines and the potential for serious adverse reactions.