

# THE OVER-VACCINATION DEBATE

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For many years now, we personally as breeders and through the editorial content of **National DOG** as recently as last month, have stated our position on the unnecessary over-vaccination of dogs and cats. Finally after many years of dedicated hard work by many people, the ball is really rolling and we now have a vast volume of excellent material on hand which we will continue to publish as space permits.

Amongst all this positive action, there is one thing we feel must NOT be overlooked, and that is the importance of initial vaccination with what are called Core Vaccines, in the case of dogs, those for Distemper, Hepatitis and Parvo Virus. We know that some highly respected people, especially those practising in the field of herbal medicine, do not agree with us, but we would not want our readers or puppy purchasers to misunderstand our own stance.

From the Sydney Morning Herald  
<http://www.smh.com.au/environment/vets-dogged-by-criticism-over-vaccinations-20090731-e4f7.html>

PET OWNERS are wasting millions of dollars a year and may even be exposing their animals to harm by heeding the advice of their vets. Australians spend about \$30 on annual vaccinations, invariably at the behest of reminder notices from their local vets.

But international standards in place for the past two years recommend vaccinating no more than once every three years, after research established that core vaccinations provide immunity for between four years and a lifetime for an adult cat or dog.

Possible links have also been identified between over-vaccination and injection-site tumours in cats and immunological diseases in dogs. As a result, the international scientific veterinary body, the World Small Animal Veterinary Association, formally endorsed triennial core vaccinations in 2007 at its world congress.

But while many countries – including the US, Britain and New Zealand – have since adopted this practice, the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) still supports annual core vaccinations for canine parvovirus, distemper and hepatitis, and feline calicivirus, herpesvirus and parvovirus.

The association's stance has attracted accusations that vets are continuing outdated and possibly harmful practices to protect their incomes.

In a letter sent to the association earlier this year, a number of veterinary academics demanded the annual vaccination policy be updated.

*"There's this belief that if people aren't told to vaccinate annually, they'll stop coming*

*in for annual check-ups, but that amounts to false pretence,"* one of the signatories, Dr Steven Holloway from the University of Melbourne's faculty of veterinary science, told the Herald.

Dr Richard Squires, an associate professor of veterinary clinical sciences at James Cook University, and the only Australian on the World Small Animal Veterinary Association's Scientific Advisory Committee, said there was no longer any rational basis for annual revaccination. *"Australia appears to be somewhat behind,"* he said.

But Mark Lawrie, the national president of the AVA, said his association was moving cautiously down the path towards triennial vaccination. Delays in adopting it were due to conditions unique to Australia, including the unavailability of a feline calicivirus vaccine authorised for use at three-yearly intervals.

*"We're being justifiably conservative,"* Dr Lawrie said. *"There's a danger in communicating any changes that people might take the message not to vaccinate at all. A lot more animals die because they haven't been vaccinated than from adverse reactions."*

Madeleine Anderson, from Sydney's inner west, said she has always followed her vet's advice on all matters concerning the welfare of her two cross-breed cattle dogs Anu and Kuggee.

She said she was surprised to learn that, according to international best practice, she could be over-vaccinating her dogs.

*"It's not about the money, it's always been what's best for my dogs,"* she said. *"I've always vaccinated annually – and I'm not sure I can bring myself to change that. I'll have to have a serious think about it."*

## OPEN LETTER

Dr Mark Lawrie, National President  
Australian Veterinary Association  
Via email: [mlawrie@ava.com.au](mailto:mlawrie@ava.com.au)

Dear Dr Lawrie,

Your contribution to the SMH article on Aug 1-2, 2009 wasn't exactly a class act, was it! You said that *"Delays in adopting [triennial vaccination] were due to conditions unique to Australia, including the unavailability of a feline calicivirus vaccine authorized for use at three-yearly intervals."*

Are you deliberately missing the point of the whole revaccination argument?

Good quality MLV vaccines, when given appropriately to a healthy dog or cat, have been shown to induce solid immunity to the virus fractions in question for 7 years on challenge to 15 years on serology. Hence, AAEP, AAHA, WSAVA and the European Advisory Board on Cat Diseases issued guidelines and made recommendations for extended inter-vaccination intervals in 2001, 2003, and 2007 respectively. The recommendations and guidelines for the veterinary practitioners were based on available (read: TRADITIONAL) ANNUAL products! The recommended change to 3-year inter-vaccination intervals was a compromise for the veterinarians (refer AAHA 2003), despite the long-term DOI studies by, especially Prof Ron Schultz.

This begs the question: **Why does Australia need to wait for the approval of 3-year products?**

Thanks to the cynicism of one manufacturer, and the obliging nature of our national drug regulator, one such TRADITIONAL ANNUAL vaccine had been upgraded mid-2005 from 12 months to 39 months, only to be downgraded again some 18 months later, once the market introduction of a so-called 'extended DOI' product was accomplished. (I had both sets of IDENTICAL study documents released to me, with omissions, under the Freedom of Information Act.)

What would be the other "conditions unique to Australia" which have impeded the acceptance of Evidence-Based Medicine for companion animals? Surely, like New Zealand but unlike Europe and the United States, we are in one of the best locations (read: isolation) without 'through-traffic' of

pets and livestock which could potentially lead to the spread of infectious diseases?

In the SMH article, you also commented that *"There is a danger in communicating any changes that people might take the message not to vaccinate at all."* I'm not sure whether you are selling your profession short, or whether you are taking the mickey out of your clients. If the veterinarian was to communicate the "change" in terms and context that pet owners can understand, why would this message be so misconstrued by the pet owner?

After the weekend's 'revelations' came the new Policy for the Vaccination of Dogs and Cats, ratified by the AVA Board on 26 June 2009. (I note with interest that the policy was renamed from "Responsible Use of Immunobiologicals".)

Having read the Policy, Background and Guidelines, I cannot help but think that nothing is really going to change on the companion animal vaccination front in Australia:

The first sentence of your new Policy states that *"Vaccination protocols should be determined ... on attributes such as duration of immunity of available vaccines..."*

The bulk of canine vaccines on the Australian market is approved for 12-month duration of immunity. References to off-label use seem to have a somewhat negative connotation, suggesting that one maybe shouldn't resort to it?

Your new Policy states: "Informed consent is important." Informed consent is actually prescribed in the legislation governing veterinary practitioners, i.e. you have a legal obligation to communicate an individual risk/benefit assessment to your clients!

In the Background to the Policy you repeat that same magic sentence which did appear in the 1999 draft for a vaccination policy change: **"Although annual vaccination has long been considered standard practice in Australia, scientific information exists to suggest that the duration of immunity (DOI) delivered by many of the products available is variable, and may be significantly longer than 12 months..."** Yet, 10 years on, and you are essentially STILL advocating outdated vaccination protocols for dogs and cats!

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## IT'S BEEN A DOG'S LIFE - BUT NO COMPLAINTS HERE

SNP Security's oldest serving patrol officer has joined an elite group after being recognised for years of dedicated service to the State Government.

At the tender age of eight (or 56 in human years), Jag was the first SNP Security 'employee' to be presented a medal in honour of service by the Australian Defence Force Trackers and War Dogs Association (ADFTWDA).

Managing Director of SNP Security, Tom Roche, is delighted that Jag is able to receive recognition for the many years of service he has provided to Railcorp through his work with SNP.

*"There has been a 20% reduction in graffiti and vandalism reported in the Railcorp train yards where Jag worked, which means ultimately more savings to the government in cleaning and maintenance costs."*

*Jag is a shining example of SNP's canine patrols. It's great to have some formal acknowledgement of the contribution our dogs have made in protecting people, business and the community at large,"* says Tom.

The medals have been created by ADFTWDA to recognise the important role canines have played in serving their nation in times of war and peace. Dogs that have provided aggregated service of five years or more to either State or Federal government within Australia or on foreign soil, such as Afghanistan, will be acknowledged.

*"Rapid advancements in security technology mean we now have hi-tech security software that can cover large areas thoroughly and at a relatively low cost. Dogs are not as widely required due to advances in other forms of security, but they are still highly effective in certain applications such as Railcorp as both 'detection' and 'deterrent' of intruders,"* says Tom.

But Jag isn't complaining, he's off to a life of leisurely retirement with an endless supply of bones to bury in the garden.