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Leptospirosis Now Included in Canine Core Vaccine Recommendations

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Updated: Jun 26, 2024 | 4 Minutes



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In a significant move, veterinary health authorities have updated the core vaccine recommendations for dogs to now include the leptospirosis vaccine. This update is particularly important for dog breeders, who play a crucial role in the health and well-being of future generations of dogs.

The leptospirosis vaccine has been controversial for decades with stories of severe vaccine reactions, including death in puppies. Late last year, the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine (ACVIM) published an update to its 2010 [consensus statement on leptospirosis in dogs](#), which incorporates over a decade of research and information to provide more insight into preventing, diagnosing, and treating this zoonotic disease. As part of that update, the leaders in veterinary infectious disease recommend including leptospirosis as a core vaccine for all dogs. This new recommendation encourages dog owners and breeders to reconsider their views on vaccination for leptospirosis.

Understanding Leptospirosis

Leptospirosis is a bacterial infection caused by the *Leptospira* bacteria, which can affect dogs, humans, and other animals. It is typically spread through the urine of infected animals, contaminating water sources and soil. Dogs can contract leptospirosis by drinking contaminated water, coming into contact with contaminated soil, or through open wounds. The disease can cause severe kidney and liver damage, and in some cases, it can be fatal. There are over 250 different types, known as serovars, of leptospirosis. Currently in North America, vaccines containing 4 serovars (*Icterohaemorrhagiae*, *Canicola*, *Grippotyphosa*, and *Pomona*) are available, and typically provide protection for 12 months. The vaccine provides protection for the specific serovar, but cross-protection for other serovars has been documented. Therefore, awareness of leptospirosis and environmental management are still important components of prevention.

Why the Change?

The inclusion of leptospirosis in the core vaccine recommendations is driven by several factors:

- 1. Increased Incidence:** There has been a notable rise in leptospirosis cases in various regions, posing a significant health risk to dogs.
- 2. Geographic Spread:** Previously considered a risk in rural or tropical areas, leptospirosis has become more widespread, affecting urban and suburban areas.
- 3. Severity of Disease:** Given the potentially severe and fatal nature of the disease, ensuring widespread vaccination can prevent serious health issues and fatalities.
- 4. Improved Vaccines:** Leptospirosis vaccines historically had a high rate of side effects compared to other core vaccines. Improvements in the past decade, backed by scientific studies, show that the incidence of anaphylaxis and other side effects has decreased.
- 5. Zoonotic Potential:** Leptospirosis can be transmitted from dogs to humans, which poses a significant and possibly fatal risk to people.

Core Vaccine Recommendations

Core vaccines are those that are considered essential for all dogs due to the severity and widespread nature of the diseases they prevent. They are recommended for all dogs, unless there's a medical need not to vaccinate. Ultimately, the AKC recommends discussing these updated recommendations with your dog's veterinarian.

The updated list of core vaccines now includes:

1. **Canine Distemper Virus (CDV)**
2. **Canine Adenovirus-2 (CAV-2)**
3. **Canine Parvovirus (CPV)**
4. **Rabies Virus**
5. **Leptospirosis**

Leptospirosis vaccines require 2 initial injections spaced 4 weeks apart, which can be started in puppies at 12 weeks of age or later. The ACVIM is recommending administering vaccines annually to all dogs starting at 12 weeks of age, regardless of breed. The vaccine is also being recommended as a requirement for boarding kennels.

Implications for Dog Breeders

Leptospirosis vaccine has had an unfavorable reputation among breeders for decades, so it is understandable to have reservations about these updated recommendations. If a breeder is concerned about giving puppies a leptospirosis vaccine based on past experiences, there are a few options that can be discussed with your veterinarian. Consider administering only the leptospirosis vaccine at one visit, without the other core vaccines. Monitor a puppy or dog for 48 hours after administration for signs of a reaction, including fever, lethargy, decreased appetite, or swelling at the vaccination site. Signs of anaphylaxis typically occur within a few minutes to hours after vaccination and include fainting or collapse, vomiting or diarrhea, difficulty breathing, swelling or puffiness in the head, and red itchy bumps. If a vaccine reaction occurs, then it is known to be a result of the leptospirosis vaccine.

As custodians of their breed's future, dog breeders must stay informed about health recommendations to ensure they are providing the best care for their dogs. Here are key considerations and steps for breeders in light of this update:

1. **Vaccination Protocols:** Update vaccination protocols to include leptospirosis as part of the core vaccinations for all breeding dogs and puppies.
2. **Health Records:** Maintain detailed health records for all dogs, including vaccination history. Provide new puppy owners with comprehensive health records and information on the importance of ongoing vaccinations.
3. **Breeder Education:** Stay informed about the latest research and recommendations on canine health. Participate in continuing education opportunities and collaborate with veterinarians to ensure best practices.
4. **Buyer Education:** Educate puppy buyers about the importance of the leptospirosis vaccine and other core vaccines. Provide information on the risks of leptospirosis, how it spreads, and the benefits of vaccination.

5. **Environmental Management:** Implement strategies to reduce the risk of leptospirosis in your breeding environment. This includes controlling rodent populations, preventing access to stagnant water sources, and maintaining good hygiene practices.

Conclusion

The inclusion of leptospirosis in the core vaccine recommendations marks a significant advancement in canine health care. For breeders, this update emphasizes the importance of comprehensive vaccination programs to protect their dogs from potentially severe diseases. By integrating the leptospirosis vaccine into routine care, breeders can help ensure the long-term health and well-being of their dogs and contribute positively to the overall health of the canine community.

Citation:

Sykes JE, Francey T, Schuller S, Stoddard RA, Cowgill LD, Moore GE. Updated ACVIM consensus statement on leptospirosis in dogs. *J Vet Intern Med.* 2023; 37(6): 1966-1982. doi:[10.1111/jvim.16903](https://doi.org/10.1111/jvim.16903)

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