

Can Vaccines Cause Disease?

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Lisa Hanks

Veterinarians have long celebrated the health benefits of regular dog vaccinations to prevent a number of diseases. Today, however, an increasing number of veterinarians — and pet owners — claim vaccines can cause illnesses rather than prevent them.

Most dogs receive a battery of vaccinations over a lifetime and show no problems. But both conventional and holistic veterinarians say reactions to vaccination collectively called vaccinosis, do occasionally occur and the immunity each grants may not be as complete as we would hope.

Also, animals process vaccines differently, and some animals may have more problems adjusting to a vaccine than others. The more obvious, short-term vaccinosis reactions, usually occurring minutes to hours after injection, include swelling and pain around the injection site, fever, vomiting, seizures and anaphylactic shock (a severe allergic reaction). In rare cases, the reaction is fatal.

Holistic veterinarians also link other short-term reactions to vaccinations, including swelling and redness around the face and ears, paw licking, generalized itchiness and even altered behavior and increased aggression.

Canine vaccinosis has not been closely researched because of a lack of resources. Holistic veterinarians base their conclusions on clinical experience, personal observations, inferences from feline and human studies and networking with colleagues.

Many believe vaccine-related illnesses are not directly caused by the injections themselves. They also think as the body's immune system attempts to deal with vaccines, it is easier for developing illnesses to manifest themselves or aggravate existing problems. For instance, if your dog is prone to allergies, it may suddenly begin itching or develop a new allergy. Conventional veterinarians blame undiagnosed illnesses present at the time of the vaccination. They point out no proof that a link exists between vaccinations and the seemingly inexplicable illnesses some dogs develop.

But holistic veterinarians believe a lifelong course of immunizations and boosters weakens and stunts a dog's immune system, eventually leading to serious immune-related illnesses such as arthritis, allergies, cancer, leukemia, hypothyroidism and epilepsy.