

## Adjust Dog Vaccinations to Avoid Side Effects

**An expert answers questions on dog vaccinations.**

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**Q:** We have a 2-year-old female Lhasa Apso. She has had a bad reaction to all of her vaccinations, including twice last year to the leptospira vaccine, which we decided not to give her anymore. This year she had parvovirus within 24 hours after her vaccination. About six weeks later she had a seizure and another one or two weeks later. Could the seizures be related to her vaccine reactions?

Can we take any precautions to avoid another reaction the next time her shots are due? Is it possible to test her immune system or to give her shots separately rather than as a combination booster? Also, is it necessary for a small dog to have rabies shots ever two years?

**A:** People are not vaccinated for every infectious disease only for diseases they might reasonably contract. I recommend a similar approach in dogs: Vaccinate only when exposure is likely, when the disease would be severe or fatal if contracted or when required by law.

Vaccines are not always harmless. They've been carefully prepared to be potent stimulators of the immune system. As you have experienced, the system is not perfect.

In some cases, vaccines establish immunity without side effects. In others, overstimulation of the immune system may cause a reaction. Many chronic diseases and immune-related conditions in dogs such as allergies and immune-mediated diseases may be related to vaccination.

To help avoid vaccination problems, create a list of vaccines considered necessary and weigh the benefit of each against the chances of a serious reaction. The risk often outweighs the potential benefits.

Ask your veterinarian if your dog has immunity from prior vaccinations. Research shows yearly vaccinations are probably not needed for many infectious agents.

Blood tests can check immunity and antibody levels for some infectious diseases. But clear guidelines for interpreting the test results have not been established.

Take special care with known reactors if you decide a vaccine is necessary. Watch your dog closely for at least 48 to 72 hours after it's vaccinated. If this is not possible, postpone vaccination until you have time to watch the dog's response.