

# New Vaccination Guidelines

## Christine Makowski DVM

Are you still taking your Weimaraner to the veterinarian for yearly vaccinations? The visit for an annual physical exam is a wise idea and should definitely be continued. However, you may be surprised to learn that the vaccinations may not only be unnecessary, but perhaps even harmful. Excessive vaccination and its consequences has become a hotly debated subject in the world of veterinary medicine.

Many veterinarians claim that vaccinations have nearly wiped out such previously common viral diseases as distemper and parvo. While this may be true, a significant number of professionals and pet owners have begun to question the need for *lifelong* and *annual* revaccination, as well as the potential consequences of vaccination in general.

Weimaraners in particular are a breed that is susceptible to a syndrome called Hyperinflammatory Disease. This involves overreaction to certain (sometimes unknown) external factors and can result in such problems as HOD, fever, joint pain, hemolytic anemia, Inflammatory Bowel Disease, and meningitis. Unfortunately, a significant percentage of Weims are suspected of having these problems due to a vaccine reaction.

Yearly vaccination for diseases such as distemper, parvovirus, kennel cough, Lyme disease and a host of others is the reason for many people to visit a veterinarian with their dog. The questions regarding this practice have resulted in new vaccination guidelines proposed by the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) Canine Vaccine Task Force. These guidelines suggest that *annual* vaccination of most dogs of all breeds is *unnecessary*, and that most major vaccines will provide protection for at least three years.

The task force goes further and divides vaccinations into *core* (rabies, distemper, parvovirus, adenovirus-2), *non-core* (parainfluenza, bordetella, leptospirosis, lyme) and *not recommended* (giardia, coronavirus).

Core vaccines are those that should be received by all dogs, but a yearly schedule is perhaps unnecessary. Non-core vaccines are considered optional and are used selectively based on the dog's geographic location and lifestyle. This considers how often the dog visits a kennel, dog park, competitive event etc. Does your Weim really need a kennel cough or a Lyme disease vaccination? What is their exposure?

Vaccination timing should also consider whether the animal is fully healthy or not. Is the dog in the middle of an acute allergic reaction? Hospitalization for surgery? An acute attack of diarrhea? The infirmities of old age? These are illnesses and sick animals should never be vaccinated. It says so right on the vaccine label - in the fine print.

Some veterinarians and pet owners also question the practice of combining many vaccinations in one bottle. When your Weim receives his or her vaccination, there may be 3,4,5, or in some cases 7 different vaccines in that one shot! While this is commonly done as a matter of convenience, many veterinarians and educated pet owners realize that this practice may be causing many of the vaccination reactions our dogs are experiencing. These vaccines with multiple agents are called *multivalent*. Opposed to this are vaccines that are *monovalent* and have just one vaccination per injection. This means your dog could get just a parvo vaccination if that is all that was needed. These monovalent vaccines are perhaps more appropriate for the breeds such as Weimaraners who are susceptible to Hyperinflammatory Disease and vaccine reaction.

Another strategy to avoid overvaccination is to test antibody levels or *titers* in the blood of your Weimaraner. These levels may suggest the level of immunity that your pet carries to the diseases of distemper and parvovirus. High levels of antibody, a history of proper vaccination as a puppy, and general good health may be a rationale toward not vaccinating for these diseases at all in a mature adult. Low levels suggest a susceptibility to disease and a need for vaccination.

Why haven't you heard a lot about monovalent vaccines and antibody titers? The main reason is cost – they aren't going to save you any money. In fact they will cost more and perhaps even be unavailable at your veterinarian.

A reasonable alternative for those unable to do titers and monovalent vaccines is to divide vaccination administration as much as possible. Use the multivalent vaccine for distemper/parvo/adenovirus one year. The following year give rabies. The third year no vaccines are necessary. This cycle will use each vaccine every three years – the timing that the AAHA recommends. The cycle can then be repeated for as long as your Weim needs vaccinations. Remember that the yearly physical, heartworm and stool checks are just as important as the vaccination. Do not neglect these in the year that your Weim does not require a vaccination.

Remember that vaccination requirements are still a subject of debate in the veterinary profession. Not all veterinarians are following the new recommendations. You can find all this information on the internet – the AAHA website is difficult to navigate. They eventually send you to [www.healthypet.com](http://www.healthypet.com) where there is a listing for canine vaccination guidelines. Read it and educate yourself. If your veterinarian or boarding kennel still insists on yearly vaccination ask them why. Then decide if you agree. You are in charge of the health and well being of your Weimaraner. Your dog depends on you.

**Dr. Makowski graduated from Cornell Veterinary School with honors in 1977. She is a member of the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association; the International Veterinary Academy of Pain Management; and the American Canine Sports Medicine Association. She was certified by the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society in 1998, the International Veterinary Chiropractic Association in 2004, and is a graduate of the UT Canine Rehabilitation course.**

**Dr. Makowski is not only an experienced vet and proud owner of two Weimaraners but she is also a Foster Home for TSWR. You can find Dr. Makowski at her clinic ... the Landenberg Vet Clinic ... where she provides Holistic Veterinary Care & Consulting. 610-255-5372**

