

Vaccines in Shelters and Group Settings

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KEYWORDS

- Dogs • Cats • Vaccines • Vaccinations • Animal shelters • Rescue shelters
- Shelter medicine

KEY POINTS

- Animals living or congregating in medium-sized to large groups are at much greater risk of acquiring 1 or more contagious infectious diseases than animals living alone or in small groups. They need protecting.
- Special recommendations for the vaccination of young animals in group situations, especially those housed in animal shelters, have been published. These generally recommend an earlier start to vaccination, more frequent vaccination while maternal antibodies are likely to be interfering with immunization, and a slightly later finish.
- Adult animals entering such facilities or engaging in group activities also need the protection of vaccination if their previous vaccination status is uncertain.

INTRODUCTION

Population size, density, and instability have long been recognized as crucially important determinants of the risk of acquiring contagious infectious diseases.^{1,2} So, special consideration of the use of vaccines in animal shelters and other group settings is appropriate. Many animal shelters contain large, rapidly fluctuating populations of variably disease-susceptible animals in high-density housing. Many, although certainly not all, must operate with less-than-optimal resourcing. It is extremely challenging to limit contagious infectious diseases in such facilities. Vaccines play an important role in an overarching shelter management strategy that is intended to limit morbidity and mortality in individual animals, and to avoid or minimize the frequency of disease outbreaks while (crucially) enabling the shelter to continue to fulfill its overall mission and goals for society.³

This article focuses on the use of vaccines in dogs and cats that are housed or congregate in groups, especially those living in animal shelters. Only vaccines

Disclosure Statement: Dr R.A. Squires is a member of the WSAVA Vaccination Guidelines Group, a group of independent academics whose travel is sponsored by MSD Animal Health. Veterinary Clinical Sciences, Veterinary Science, Discipline of Veterinary Science, James Cook University, 1 Solander Road, Townsville, Queensland 4811, Australia
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Vet Clin Small Anim ■ (2017) ■-■
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cvs.2017.10.006>

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intended to help prevent or diminish the severity of contagious infectious diseases are considered.

EXISTING GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF VACCINES IN ANIMAL SHELTERS

Several large veterinary professional organizations have, over the last 2 decades, produced periodically updated guidelines and recommendations for the vaccination of dogs and cats.^{4–8} To a large extent, the recommendations provided by these organizations are in agreement with each another.⁹ Links to the most recent of these guidelines are provided in **Table 1**. All of these organizations provide separate, specific advice concerning the use of vaccines in animal shelters, either as separate publications^{7,10} or embedded in their main guidelines documents.⁴

Quality and Volume of Available Evidence to Guide Decision-Making

Although multiple sets of detailed, increasingly well-referenced guidelines exist, it should be recognized that the quality of available scientific evidence on which vaccination guidelines are based is variable, the total quantity of evidence remains quite limited, and some of the evidence is not readily accessible by veterinary scientists and clinicians. By no means is all of the evidence peer reviewed and, in any case, peer review cannot be relied on as an absolute guarantee of scientific rigor and reliability. As a consequence, at least 1 of the organizations that produce vaccination guidelines has developed a framework that categorizes the quality of evidence provided by publications in veterinary vaccinology.⁴ This categorization is useful; inevitably, however, there is substantial variability in quality and reliability within each of the defined categories.

VACCINES NEED TO FIT WITHIN AN OVERALL HEALTH MANAGEMENT PROGRAM IN AN ANIMAL SHELTER

Animal shelters in America have an interesting history, having evolved from livestock impounds that were established in colonial villages and towns.¹¹ Today's animal shelters are enormously variable in almost every conceivable way (eg, mission, goals, governance, philosophic approach, management, size, design, funding, staffing, community involvement, and location). Despite this enormous heterogeneity, shelters grapple with many shared challenges.³

Table 1

Organizations that have published vaccination guidelines over the last 2 decades, including specific recommendations for vaccination of animals in shelters

Name of Organization	Publication Dates for Guidelines	Species Covered	Link to Their Most Recent Guidelines
AAFP	1998, 2000, 2006, 2013	Cats	https://www.catvets.com/guidelines/practice-guidelines/feline-vaccination-guidelines
AAHA	2003, 2006, 2007, 2011, 2017	Dogs	https://www.aaha.org/guidelines/canine_vaccination_guidelines.aspx
WSAVA	2007, 2010, 2016	Both	http://www.wsava.org/guidelines/vaccination-guidelines
ABCD	2009, 2013, 2015	Cats	http://www.abcdcatsvets.org/guidelines/

Abbreviations: AAFP, American Association of Feline Practitioners; AAHA, American Animal Hospital Association; ABCD, European Advisory Board on Cat Diseases; WSAVA, World Small Animal Veterinary Association.

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