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The Risk of Vaccine-Associated Sarcomas in Cats

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February 15, 2010. In the early 1990s a few veterinarians started to notice a disturbing trend. Sarcomas, a type of malignant tumor, were being found more frequently in cats. The location of these masses was quite suspicious--they were in the same area in which routine vaccinations were administered.

Shortly thereafter, experts came to the startling conclusion that the feline leukemia vaccine and the feline rabies vaccine may be to blame, (although other causes have since been identified as well). Because of this development, the Vaccine-Associated Feline Sarcoma Task Force was established in 1996 by several prominent organizations, including the American Veterinary Medical Association.

The swift and massive response likely had to do with the fact that sarcomas are a difficult type of tumor to treat. Surgical excision of the mass (requiring general anesthesia) with wide margins is necessary in nearly all cases. In addition, the tumors almost always recur and appear to have a higher rate of metastasis (spread) to other parts of the body.

So the question arises, do the benefits of vaccinating your cat for these diseases outweigh the risks?

Yes. "The risk of getting an infectious disease is much higher than the risk of developing a sarcoma at the injection site," explains Dr. Jackie Wypij, a veterinary oncologist at the University of Illinois Veterinary Teaching Hospital in Urbana. Current statistics estimate that 1 in 5,000 to 1 in 10,000 cats receiving a vaccine will develop a sarcoma.

Since the task force began studying the problem, there has been much reform. For example, new vaccination schedules have been developed, decreasing the frequency in which the shots need to be administered and specifying specific anatomic places to inject them. In addition, because the aluminum adjuvants (a chemical agent used to stimulate an immune response) in the vaccinations were suspected to cause the problem, vaccine manufacturers have ceased using them.

Still, it is important to weigh the risks. For example, an older indoor cat may not need the feline leukemia virus vaccine. Except that, if that cat escapes out of the front door one day when you're not looking, you may be asking for trouble. All it would take is for your unvaccinated indoor cat to come into contact with a leukemia positive cat, and presto--your beloved Fluffy may have feline leukemia. Although the disease is not one that is transmitted easily, it nevertheless is a terminal disease that could have been prevented.

In the case of rabies, there is not much leeway. In many municipalities the vaccine is required for cats and dogs. Not doing so may be breaking the law, and also puts your pets' welfare in limbo if it bites a human. Let's say your unvaccinated cat bites your child's playmate one day when they are playing a little too rough. Without proof of a rabies vaccination, animal control officials can seize the animal from your house and quarantine it. It's also worth noting that the only definitive way to test for Rabies is with a brain biopsy.

In the end, vaccine-associated sarcomas are still a hot topic in veterinary medicine. The risks of vaccination should not be overlooked, but neither should the potential benefits. To decide what is best for your cat, please talk to your local veterinarian. <http://vetmed.illinois.edu/petcolumns/>

Utah: Panel Resists Ban on Animal Gas Chambers

Euthanasia » Lethal injection 'very stressful' for shelter workers.

A House committee has thwarted attempts to restrict the use of gas chambers for killing unwanted shelter animals in Utah. After hearing emotional testimony Friday from animal-control officers, members of the House Government Operations Committee altered HB185 to ease proposed rules on use of carbon monoxide and give shelters leeway in choosing between lethal injection and gas for euthanizing cats and dogs. They then approved the measure, sponsored by Rep. Jay Seegmiller, D-Sandy, and sent it to the full House for debate.

Using modern techniques, gassing animals is fast-acting and painless and is considered a humane means of euthanasia under veterinary practice, animal-control officers and veterinarians told the committee. Several said they chose gas over lethal injection when forced to put down animal companions of their own.

“If I didn't think this was humane, I wouldn't do it,” Sandy animal control officer Rich Bergan said as he fought back tears. Unlike a gas chamber, lethal injection requires shelter workers to hold and sometimes restrain an animal while it dies, according to Tug Gettling, director of the North Utah Valley Animal Shelter. “It's very stressful for them,” Gettling said --- especially when they might have to put down 50 to 100 animals in one day. Gas chambers, instead, give shelter workers some distance from the animal's death, while also providing a safer option for putting down wild or aggressive animals, he said. *Source: Salt Lake City Tribune*

Pet Tales – An AVMA Storybook Series

The AVMA and Soundprints, a children's publishing company, have created Pet Tales – a series of colorful pet stories targeted to children from preschool through second grade. Each book is packaged with either an audio CD or plush toy.

Pet Tales books provide young children with engaging animal stories and teach them about responsible pet ownership and animal care. Children can meet “Tracker”, a German Shepherd, who is a police dog; “Ginger”, a Golden Retriever, a guide dog who helps her blind owner walk thru busy intersections, shop for groceries, and get on the bus; “Baxter”, a stray cat looking for a home; and “Searcher”, the Labrador Retriever on a mission to rescue trapped skiers.

Pet Tales and related Pet Tales products are available at Soundprints <http://tinyurl.com/yz6svm3>.

Ohio Gov. Denounces HSUS Ballot Plan

Ohio Democratic Governor Ted Strickland and his GOP rival candidate John Kasich both declared their opposition to a ballot measure being planned by the out-of-state activist organization the Humane Society of the United States. The Washington, D.C.-based animal rights organization has prepared to use paid petition gatherers to place on the November ballot a measure to overturn State Issue 2, which was approved by Ohio voters by a nearly 2-1 margin just under four months ago.

Issue 2 created the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board to allow broad public input into farm animal care issues. The HSUS plan would force the Care Board to adopt HSUS policies.

Both gubernatorial candidates endorsed Issue 2 and now agree that it's wrong for HSUS to attempt to overturn the will of Ohio voters.

"If we want to eat, and if we want access to affordable and inexpensive food, it is important for the agricultural community within our state not to be hamstrung and to have their hands tied behind their back by those who do not fully appreciate the value of what happens on our farms," said Gov. Strickland.

Referencing HSUS's "extremism," candidate Kasich said, "No outsiders ought to come in here and try to destroy our farms."

Last week a HSUS watchdog Web site, www.HumaneWatch.org was launched which plans coverage on HSUS' efforts at the national as well as state levels. "Ohio and Missouri are big battlegrounds for HSUS this year and we will be covering them extensively," says David Martosko, Center for Consumer Freedom, the site's sponsor.

"The Ohio pork industry demonstrates to its consumers that the well-being of hogs in the state is a top priority," says Dick Isler, executive vice president, Ohio Pork Producers Council. "I would add that HSUS should try to work with the Animal Care Standards Board, not try to hijack it."

The Ohio governor candidates join Ohio Democratic Party Chairman Chris Redfern and Ohio Republic Party Chairman Kevin DeWine, who also condemned the HSUS plan during a broadcast of OFBF's radio program Town Hall Ohio.

"We don't need extreme out-of-state groups coming into Ohio. It just shows the political angle of the Humane Society," said DeWine.

"It's pretty remarkable. We haven't even had a chance to write the rules and somebody else is going to tell us what the rules should be," said Redfern. He added that HSUS "is clearly out of touch with Ohioans."

HSUS, which is not the parent of locally operated humane organizations, advocates for reducing and eliminating consumption of animal products. *Source: Ohio Farm Bureau Federation*

Related articles:

Ohio voters approve creation of livestock board. DVM360 <http://tinyurl.com/ygln3rz>

Animal care ballot petition filed in Ohio. Brownfield Ag News <http://tinyurl.com/yfyzmpr>

Officials Discuss Pet Disaster Preparations

By [David Bodenheimer](#) The Dispatch. Forty-five agencies including emergency management, animal control and law enforcement attended a training Wednesday on how to shelter animals during a disaster at Davidson County Community College.

On the agenda was how to set up and use a Companion Animal Mobile Equipment Trailer, or CAMET, in a disaster situation.

The CAMET program was created in 2006 stemming from the federal Pet Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act, or PETS Act.

CAMET works as a partnership between the N.C. Division of Emergency Management, the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the N.C. State Animal Response Team to provide assistance to pets of individuals who evacuate their home in a disaster.

Each trailer is equipped with essentials to establish an animal shelter in an appropriate building.

“The CAMET has everything inside them to set up shelter for about 50 animals,” said Dr. Mandy Tolson of the N.C. Department of Agriculture.

“They have bowls, crates, generators and non-perishable items. You could set up a shelter inside of a school, warehouse or any structure.”

Once a structure has been chosen for a shelter, pet owners register their animal. Providing a pet owner with the option to place their pets in a safe environment during a disaster is just as important as providing a safe environment for their family, Tolson said.

Tolson cited past disasters, like Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, as examples for why CAMET trailers and training for disasters are important.

“During Katrina, people wouldn't leave if they couldn't take their pets with them,” Tolson said. “That was one of the top responses as to why people wouldn't leave their home when they were asked to evacuate.”

There are 27 North Carolina counties, including Davidson, that have a CAMET trailer. The cost of each trailer is about \$14,000.

Larry Morgan, assistant director for Davidson County EMS, said his department received a CAMET trailer about eight months ago but decided to attend the training Wednesday to ensure the department would be ready in the event of a disaster.

“What we're hoping to do is get a more detailed understanding of how the equipment in the trailer operates and different ideas on how to set up emergency plans,” Morgan said.

“We've done some of that on our own, but this is the first time we've had an opportunity to get any formal training.”

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VTH Conducts Canine Seizure Study

North Carolina State University's College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) is participating in a national clinical trial evaluating a new drug to treat canine idiopathic epilepsy—a chronic condition affecting some four million dogs that is characterized by recurring seizures for which an underlying cause has not been identified.

The largest clinical trial of its kind, the blinded study is sponsored by a major animal health pharmaceutical company and is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. Hundreds of dogs at multiple investigator sites across the country are participating in the study, which will help build a body of evidence-based research that may lead to new insights into canine idiopathic epilepsy and its treatment.

“We are excited to take part in this study which may offer additional treatment options to pets with epilepsy,” says Dr. Karen Munana, associate professor of neurology. “We are constantly trying to research the causes, diagnostic options, and treatments for epilepsy in dogs. Epilepsy is one disease that can impact the human-animal bond to a huge extent.”

Breeds with evidence of genetic predisposition to seizures include Beagles, Belgian Tervurens, British Alsatians, Collies, Dachshunds, Golden Retrievers, Keeshonden, Labrador Retrievers, Vizslas, German Shepherds, and Bernese Mountain Dogs. Most epileptic dogs suffer their first seizure between the age of one and five years, and male dogs slightly outnumber females in most studies.



Qualifying canine patients must be at least four months old, not previously treated with anti-seizure medication, weigh at least 11 pounds, have no previous history of seizure clusters, and not be pregnant. Candidates must be seen by the clinical investigator within seven days of the most recent seizure. Dogs that meet the initial eligibility criteria receive free medical evaluations and diagnostic tests. Dogs that are enrolled in the treatment phase of the study receive free medication (no placebo) and monthly exams as well as a CT scan or MRI if over five years of age.

Owners of participating dogs are eligible to have funds credited to their accounts at their referring veterinary hospitals. The medication given to participants may or may not help their seizures. As with all medications, there are risks and benefits, all of which will be discussed with dog owners prior to enrollment. A consumer web site has been created to help answer dog owner questions at www.HelpForDogsWithSeizures.com.

Veterinarians receive financial rewards for referring qualified dogs for screening, and additional rewards if the dogs are enrolled into treatment. Veterinarians may call 888-598-7125, ext. 208 for additional information. To learn more about epilepsy research at the NC State CVM visit: <http://cvm.ncsu.edu/epilepsyresearch>

The Case Against Dog Parks

By Barbara Axel

Dogs are a social species. They prosper when their environment is structured and supervised and routines maintained. They get along with other dogs quite well when owners indicate the parameters within which they must behave.

Dogs have been taught to work with man to help the disabled, rescue the lost, maintain law, herd farm animals, and entertain. Countless others calmly walk alongside an owner on leash on sidewalks of busy cities or towns or while hiking with him in the wild, and often off leash under control when running or retrieving, or swimming while with their people.

They play and interact with owners, then fulfilled, happily curl up to nap at their owner's side till called upon to work and interact once more. When given human direction both intact and sterile working and pet canines behave admirably in close quarters with others of their own species.

What happens when unsupervised dogs run on their own? Because of that very inherent social nature there may be unintended consequences.

Owners have been told the oft repeated fiction that dogs, especially those who are the only pets in the household, must be exposed to and allowed to play with other canines to be happy. So they bring the dogs to designated outdoor areas called "dog parks" and set them loose to follow their own devices.

It is that very freedom that places on the pets a responsibility they usually are not able to handle. Why do we humans make the assumption that every dog must immediately like one another?

Let us look through a pet dog's eyes.

Dogs enter a fenced or roped off designated area with owners, leashes are removed and the dog is encouraged to leave his owners to "play." His people then stand around or sit on benches placed around the perimeter of the "play area," as the newly abandoned canines are left to wander alone to meet strangers in this new environment. Without direction or consent they must suddenly form a congenial pack.

Owners see a play area, but dogs that are an olfactory species also scent the messages of what has taken place the day or week before. The pet may go from tree to tree learning what signals prior visitors have left. With as little as one drop of his urine he leaves a message of his own.

The next time this pet is brought to the park he is likely to be abandoned by his owner once more to face yet a different group of canine strangers, new smells covering the old. Nevertheless he's expected to quickly acclimate. In this situation aggressive dogs may overwhelm submissive dogs, and after a while an uncertain pack order of a sort may form for the day. .

Proud owners, enthralled with the idea of entering a "play group" often read dog's body language wrong only to exacerbate this somewhat already uncertain situation.

They may misread the signal of an upright tail quivering at the tip as happiness. "Look at the way Fido's tail is wagging," they exclaim, misunderstanding the dog's message of fright, fight or flight. If they see a dog whose head is held low, lips opened in a grin with teeth visible, they mistake the submissive behavior for aggressiveness. Small dogs are encouraged to accost larger dogs for fun as the owner states that his dog just wants to be friendly. We humans are lucky larger dogs often are very tolerant of this type of incitement.

Non interference of "play" can instead lead to untoward incidents. Are dog parks staffed by paid workers knowledgeable of dog behavior so these untoward instances are avoided? Usually not.

For countless generations dogs and owners have worked, played and trained alongside one another, each secure in the partnership of the other. Dogs left in doggie day care centers are supervised by staff, and are usually kept sequestered in safe surroundings with a specific, small, congenial group of canines that have gotten to know one another over a period of time.

But the dog that is left to his own devices in constantly changing new settings without direction is often uncertain and as a result can become aggressive or fearful. The partnership of owner/dog has been violated, the structured, safe environment has disappeared, and at just the moment the dog needs his owner's input the most, the owner has withdrawn that very direction, support, and safety. While trying to enrich the life of his pet, the owner has performed an act that actually violates the human/canine bond of trust.

Do I like dog parks? No.

They are all too often just one more instance of uninformed owners misunderstanding the needs of their pets, and accidents waiting to happen.

Rottweiler Study Links Ovaries With Exceptional Longevity

New research on the biology of aging in dogs suggests a link between shortened life expectancy and ovary removal.

The study, published in the December 2009 issue of the journal *Aging Cell*, found that Rottweilers that were spayed after they were 6 years old were 4.6 times as likely to reach 13 years of age as were Rottweilers that were spayed at a younger age. The finding is important because the average life expectancy of Rottweiler dogs is 9.4 years, observed research team leader Dr. David J. Waters. "Our results support the notion that how long females keep their ovaries influences how long they live," he said.

Dr. Waters is the executive director of the Gerald P. Murphy Cancer Foundation at the Purdue Research Park in West Lafayette, Ind. The foundation is home to the Center for Exceptional Longevity Studies, which tracks the oldest living pet dogs in the country.

Although the findings may challenge long-held notions about pet neutering, Dr. Waters believes veterinarians shouldn't dismiss the research outright but, instead, see it as an exciting development in pet longevity research.

"It was once considered a fact the earth was flat, and then somebody's data said otherwise. That's what scientific discoveries do—they reshape the intellectual terrain," said Dr. Waters, who is also associate director of Purdue University's Center on Aging and the Life Course and a professor in the Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences.

Dogs are a good model for cancer studies in humans, and now there's growing support for using pet dogs in research aimed at helping people live longer lives. The National Institute on Aging, for instance, issued a call in November for information on the feasibility of studying pet dogs to advance the study of human aging.

Dr. Waters' team spent a decade collecting and analyzing medical histories, longevity, and causes of death for 119 Rottweilers in the United States and Canada that survived to 13 years of age. These dogs were compared with a group of 186 Rottweilers with more typical longevity.

Researchers found that female Rottweilers have a distinct survival advantage over males—a trend also documented in humans. That advantage appears to be determined by whether the female dog is sexually intact, however. "Taking away ovaries during the first four years of life completely erased the female survival advantage," Dr. Waters said.

The Rottweiler research mirrors the findings of the Nurses' Health Study published in May 2009 in *Obstetrics & Gynecology* by William Parker, MD, and colleagues from the John Wayne Cancer Institute in Santa Monica, Calif.

Dr. Parker's group studied more than 29,000 women who underwent a hysterectomy for benign uterine disease. The findings showed that the benefits of ovary removal—protection against ovarian, uterine, and breast cancer—were outweighed by an increased mortality rate from other causes. As a result, longevity was cut short in women who lost their ovaries before the age of 50, compared with those who kept their ovaries for at least 50 years.

How ovaries affect longevity in Rottweilers is not understood, but Dr. Waters' research points to a new set of research questions, recalibrating the conversation about removing ovaries. "We liken this to an ecosystem," Dr. Waters explained. "If you take the caterpillars out of an environment, what are you left with? I'm betting that like removing all the caterpillars, removing ovaries has unanticipated, unforeseen consequences. An adverse effect on longevity might just be one of those consequences."

Does Dr. Waters recommend that every dog owner delay their pet's ovariohysterectomy? Not at all. In fact, he cautioned against overgeneralizing the study findings, saying much more research is needed. "We studied purebred dogs living with responsible owners. You could say our results aren't pertinent to stray dogs or mongrel dogs. I don't believe every Rottweiler or every woman will benefit from keeping ovaries. That's an all-or-none stipulation, and that's not how biology works," he said, adding that tomorrow's challenge will be to identify which individuals benefit from retaining or removing ovaries.

To meet the needs of veterinarians who want to better understand the biology of aging, Dr. Waters developed a Gerontology Training Program for DVMs at Gerald P. Murphy Cancer Foundation, based on his experience teaching biogerontology to graduate students for more than a decade at Purdue. As longevity research advances, veterinarians need to be prepared. "We make the surest progress when cutting-edge research and cutting-edge education go hand in hand," Dr. Waters said. —R. Scott Nolen JAVMA March 1, 2010

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