

Newsletter of the COMMUNITY PRACTICE SERVICE

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Spring 2010

The first recognized outbreak of canine influenza in the United States was believed to have occurred in racing greyhounds in Florida. The vaccine for canine flu is likely not necessary for most dogs, including greyhounds like these pictured here, but may be advised for those that are planning to travel.



Canine flu vaccine recently developed and available

Much attention and concern has been paid over the past year to the H1N1 influenza virus that infected several species, including humans. Several years ago, an emerging influenza virus causing concern was the H3N8 virus, otherwise known as canine influenza. This particular strain mutated from a virus that infected horses, but has thus far only affected dogs. There is no evidence at this point that other species are at risk.

The first outbreaks of canine influenza in the United States began occurring in 2003 at greyhound racetracks and in companion dogs in the spring of 2004. While it has a very low fatality rate, the disease is a highly contagious, airborne virus and all dogs are susceptible to infection unless they develop immunity after contracting the disease. Up until several months ago, there was no vaccine to prevent the disease, but in 2009 a vaccine was developed and approved by the USDA for use in dogs.

"It is like most other vaccines in that it decreases the clinical signs and severity of disease, but it doesn't prevent infections," said Dr. Raelynn Farnsworth, a WSU Community Practice veterinarian. "The vaccine is considered to be very safe and the company that released it has not reported any problems. To establish immunity, dogs are first given the vaccine in two doses two to four weeks apart, and then an annual booster is required thereafter.

"As far as we know, there haven't been any cases of canine influenza in Washington, and we consider it a non-essential vaccine in our area," she said. "The decision to vaccinate a dog is very much based on the individual pet's

needs, which includes their activity level, things they are exposed to, and if they travel."

Most cases of canine influenza have been reported in dogs that have been housed in shelters, kennels, or other community facilities like racetracks. The disease has been detected in 30 states in the United States. Current hotspots include New York City, Philadelphia, New Jersey, Colorado (especially Denver), and parts of southern Florida.

"We do recommend the vaccine if you are planning to travel with your dog to certain hotspots where the disease has been reported," Dr. Farnsworth said. "The vaccine needs to be timed so that the last booster shot is given at least two weeks before the planned event or traveling occurs. While we haven't seen any cases in Washington, it is likely there will be an increase in the number of canine influenza cases as it spreads because people and their pets travel so much now."

Fortunately, most dogs with canine influenza experience a mild form of the disease. It begins with exposure to the virus followed by a two-to five-day incubation period. After that, dogs usually suffer from a persistent cough that may last for as long as three weeks, and may produce a yellowish nasal discharge. Dogs that experience more serious canine influenza symptoms frequently have a high fever, increased breathing rates, and other indications of pneumonia. Currently, antibiotic treatment of secondary bacterial infections of the sinuses or lungs, and other supportive care, is successful in about 95

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Vaccination Recommendations for 2010

Dogs and cats are susceptible to contagious diseases, usually caused by microorganisms. Immunizations help protect pets against disease and should begin when a puppy or kitten is just a few weeks old. To keep pets guarded against disease, it is important to maintain an appropriate vaccination schedule.

Sometimes, specific vaccine recommendations change because of studies that reassess and determine duration of immunity by vaccinations. In addition, new vaccines may become available, such as the one for canine influenza virus, once they are approved for use by the USDA.

WSU's Community Practice adapts vaccine recommendations as new information emerges. In addition to standard recommendations, each individual animal's needs, based on risk and lifestyle, are taken into consideration before determining what vaccine to give and how often it needs to be repeated. Our goal is to minimize the number of vaccines administered to each patient while maintaining optimal protection against serious infectious diseases. Here are the current guidelines we recommend:

Cats



Rabies:

All kittens and adult cats should receive rabies vaccination. The rabies virus causes a fatal brain infection that can also infect people. The hazard to human health is too great to risk having an unvaccinated cat as a pet. A recombinant rabies vaccine is available that minimizes tissue irritation at the injection site. This vaccine should be administered in kittens between 12 to 16 weeks of age and annually thereafter.

FVRCP:

All kittens and adult cats should also receive Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, and Panleukopenia vaccinations. These diseases can be very serious and often highly contagious. Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis causes an upper respiratory illness and corneal ulceration due to a feline herpes virus. Calicivirus causes upper respiratory illness and ulcers on the tongue and in the mouth. Panleukopenia, also known as feline parvovirus, causes significant diarrhea, vomiting, and bone marrow suppression.

Kittens are scheduled to receive this vaccine at 8 weeks of age, followed by boosters at 12 and 16 weeks of age. WSU uses an intranasal vaccine, which requires an annual booster. It has few side effects, with the most common one being mild post-vaccination sneezing.

Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV):

FeLV can cause immune suppression, cancer, and anemia. It is fatal to many cats, especially kittens that develop the disease. Depending on how endemic it is to a particular area and the indoor/outdoor lifestyle of a cat, this vaccine should be administered to at-risk kittens at 12 and 16 weeks of age and annually thereafter. The vaccine is considered a non-essential vaccine because it is only necessary for cats directly exposed to other cats. FeLV can only be transmitted by direct contact with an infected cat shedding the virus, so indoor cats that do not come into contact with outdoor cats do not need to be vaccinated for FeLV. In this case, the risk of an adverse reaction such as an injection site tumor outweighs any potential risk of the disease. It is also important to remember that this vaccine is not 100 percent protective. Cats that are vaccinated but exposed to diseased cats may still run the risk of contracting FeLV. Currently, WSU administers a recombinant transdermal vaccine that avoids the use of a hypodermic needle.

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CANINE FLU VACCINE | *continued from page 1*

percent of cases. Antibiotics do not destroy viruses, however, and most dogs will not need antibiotics.

"Canine influenza produces symptoms similar to kennel cough, but usually dogs with kennel cough have a dry, hacking cough and no fever," Dr. Farnsworth said. "Clinical signs of canine flu commonly include nasal discharge, sneezing, and a fever. While the signs are similar, vaccinating a dog for kennel cough (bordetella) will not prevent canine influenza, and the canine influenza vaccine will not prevent kennel cough in dogs."

It is possible to diagnose a dog suspected of having canine influenza, but it can be difficult and depends on which stage of disease the dog is experiencing. Dogs cannot be diagnosed based only on clinical signs because the signs are similar to other diseases that cause respiratory illness.

Blood tests may identify antibodies to the virus in a dog's blood within the first seven days that clinical signs appear. The virus may also be identified with nasal or pharyngeal swabs taken during the first four days of illness. For the most accurate diagnosis, it may be preferable to compare antibody tests to blood tests. The virus is undetectable 8-9 days post-infection,

but a dog may produce antibody titers in the blood that may be detectable after about two weeks post-infection. Testing can be performed at the Washington Animals Disease Diagnostic Laboratory in Pullman.

"Dogs with canine influenza can have symptoms that are mild to severe," Dr. Farnsworth said. "In severe cases, it might take a couple of weeks for a dog to feel better. If veterinary care is required, we do our best to treat the symptoms and support the dog with fluids and antibiotics to help with any secondary infections."

"Owners should know that dogs with canine flu are contagious for a couple of weeks once they start to get sick," she said. "Dogs with any respiratory illness, no matter what it is, should be kept home for at least two weeks after an illness occurs to prevent the spread of infection. To help prevent canine influenza, dogs can be vaccinated and should be kept away from other dogs with any respiratory problems."

For more information about canine influenza or about getting your dog vaccinated against the H3N8 virus, contact the WSU Community Practice Service at the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital at 509-335-0711.

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV):

FIV attacks and weakens a cat's immune system. This virus is primarily transmitted by bite wounds from an infected cat. The current test for FIV cannot distinguish a vaccinated cat from an infected cat. Therefore, it is recommended that cats vaccinated against FIV be identified with a microchip or other form of identification such as a tattoo. The FIV vaccination is not currently administered at WSU unless a significant risk for FIV contact has been determined.

Although there are other vaccines available for cats, there are no other vaccines we feel are both safe and effective for routine administration for cats in eastern Washington and the surrounding area.

Dogs

Rabies:

Rabies vaccination should be administered in all puppies and adult dogs. The initial vaccination is given at approximately 12-16 weeks of age. After the first vaccine is given, a booster is given in one year, then every three years after, depending on the vaccine used.

DA2PP:

This vaccine protects against Canine Distemper, Adenovirus, Parvovirus, and Parainfluenza. Canine Distemper is a highly contagious and often fatal disease that attacks the respiratory, gastrointestinal, and nervous systems of puppies and dogs. Adenovirus causes severe liver disease, Parvovirus causes severe intestinal illness with vomiting and bloody diarrhea, and Parainfluenza causes respiratory infection.

DA2PP vaccination is recommended for all dogs. The general schedule for a puppy is to receive this vaccination at 8, 12, and 16 weeks of age, followed by a booster in one year. How often the combination vaccine should be boosted is based on each dog's individual general health status and exposure risk. In general, after the booster received one year following the initial puppy series, it is recommended that this vaccination be administered every three years. However, annual vaccination of dogs with an increased risk of exposure may be recommended.

Leptospirosis:

Leptospirosis is a serious disease of dogs that causes kidney and liver damage, or anemia. It is also contagious to humans through contact with dog urine. The leptospirosis organism is found in standing water. Domestic animals, wildlife, and rodents are reservoirs for the microorganism in the environment. While the vaccine does not protect against all forms of the organism, it does protect against several types that cause serious disease in humans and dogs.

This is considered a non-essential vaccine because not all dogs are at risk for exposure. It has been seen in patients at the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital and we recommend a four-way leptospirosis vaccine for all dogs at risk of exposure, especially hunting or field trial dogs. The first set of vaccinations is administered at 12 and 16 weeks of age in combination with the DA2PP vaccination, then annually thereafter. In addition to the annual booster, we highly recommend that hunting dogs be vaccinated one month prior to hunting season, too.

Bordetella (Kennel Cough):

Bordetella causes tracheobronchitis, known as kennel cough, which results in a dry, hacking cough in dogs. This vaccine is recommended only for dogs at higher risk for disease such as dogs that are kenneled, involved in puppy classes, are groomed, or involved in shows or field trials. It is recommended to be administered at least two weeks before potential exposure, including being boarded, groomed, or starting obedience classes. The vaccine is protective for about four to six months. The vaccination can be administered as early as 8 weeks of age. We do not consider it to be an annual vaccine.

Canine Influenza (H3N8 virus):

Canine influenza is a highly contagious airborne virus that can cause a fever, cough, nasal discharge, and other flu-like symptoms that can possibly progress to pneumonia and rarely death. It appeared in the United States in 2003, and has currently been found in 30 states. Current hotspots include New York City, Philadelphia, New Jersey, Colorado (especially Denver), and parts of southern Florida. The vaccine reduces the duration and intensity of clinical signs and protects against the formation and severity of lung lesions. It is not considered a core vaccine and it is only recommended for dogs at risk for exposure. This includes dogs that are exposed to racetracks, greyhounds, shelters, kennels, dog shows, or those traveling to currently known hot spots. So far, it has not been seen in Washington. The vaccine can be administered to puppies as young as 6 weeks of age. It is given in two doses, two to four weeks apart, and the last booster should be administered at least two weeks before traveling or risk to exposure occurs. An annual booster is required thereafter.

Although there are other vaccines available for dogs, there are no other vaccines we feel are both safe and effective for routine administration for dogs in eastern Washington or the surrounding area. If you have any questions about which vaccines are appropriate for your pet, feel free to contact the WSU Community Practice Service at 509-335-0711.



Potty training a puppy

Getting a new puppy is a fun and exciting experience, but there are some issues that can make having one in the house a challenge. Potty training is probably the least favorite task that owners face.

Understanding the stages that a puppy goes through and knowing a little about a puppy's bodily functions can greatly aid in house training a young dog, as well as help owners avoid some pitfalls that can make the task harder. One key rule to house training a puppy is that every person in the house be consistent with the training methods and rules, and to use the same commands to avoid confusing the puppy.

First, know that puppies need to go outside to relieve themselves a lot. A six to eight week old puppy will need to urinate or defecate every one to three hours during the day, and probably two to three times during the night. By three months of age, puppies can begin to wait longer and may only have to go once or twice during the night.

"A general rule of thumb is to take a young puppy's age in months and add one—that is how often in terms of hours that they will likely need to go potty," said Dr. Matthew Mickas, head of WSU's Community Practice Service and owner of a puppy himself.

There are several events in a day when puppies especially need to go, and owners can plan accordingly to avoid a mess in the house. Puppies should be taken outside to potty immediately after waking in the morning, within 20 minutes after eating, immediately at the end of a play period or after waking from a nap, and right before bedtime. In addition, owners should keep an eye out for several clues that can indicate their pet needs to go potty. If a puppy begins to sniff around, whine, circle, or abruptly stops play and attempts to disappear into a corner or another room in the house, quickly take it outside.

If a puppy has an issue with diarrhea, then the rules temporarily change. In this instance, forget the idea of a schedule and take the puppy out whenever it needs to go. A visit to the veterinarian is in order for a puppy with diarrhea. Be prepared to bring in a fecal sample for analysis during that visit.

To help puppies know where to go, designate a certain potty area outside, and always take them to that same spot. Use a phrase consistently such as "go potty" or "make" until the puppy has urinated and defecated. Once having marked the area a few times with its owner's encouragement, a puppy should know right where to go. Once finished, praise the puppy and say a phrase like "good dog."

One helpful tool in accelerating potty training is to use an indoor crate, especially at night and during unsupervised times of the day. "It prevents them from free-roaming in the house when they haven't completely learned appropriate boundaries," Dr. Mickas said. "To you, it's your dining room, but for a puppy, it's a potential place to eliminate. Concerned owners should know that in utilizing crate training, they are not banishing their new puppy to a prison cell. Some owners feel terrible at the thought of this type of training. The crate should rather be viewed as a tool utilized for training and learning. In general, canines are animals that live in dens. Puppies learn to regard a crate as a den or "safe haven" for them to go and feel secure in. When given the opportunity to learn to eliminate in an appropriate area, the puppy will not defecate or urinate in its den. Being in a crate can help them learn to gradually increase bladder control as they mature.

"In the beginning, don't be dissuaded if the puppy whines or cries after being placed in the crate," he said. "It can be useful to rock the crate gently or gently pat the crate to calm a puppy down that is getting used to the crate. We do not recommend 'puppy pads' when potty training puppies because it teaches them to relieve themselves in areas within the house. As the puppy's learning and ability to control expand, then the boundaries and ability to be unsupervised expand. Basically, the puppy eventually becomes an adult dog that views the entire home as a den."

Another key to controlling a puppy's urges to go is to set a feeding schedule. Puppies generally do well being fed two to three times

a day at consistent times, depending on their age and size. It is best to have food available for about 10-15 minutes before it is removed, and to schedule the last meal several hours before bedtime.

When potty training, it is also important to give a puppy ample time outside to get the job done, which can take up to 10 to 15 minutes. "Puppies can learn how to 'work the crowd' and be mischievous in appeasing their owners by peeing a little without fully voiding because they want to go and play. Then owners are frustrated because the puppy comes inside and eliminates in the house," Dr. Mickas said. "Be sure to give them adequate time, and avoid initiating any playing until they have done their business. It also helps to come up with a command word that tells them to go potty. It is not important what is said, but it must be consistent with each person in the family. In my family, our dog has been trained to respond to the phrase 'up the side.' It sounds kind of



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Visit the WSU Veterinary College Web site at www.vetmed.wsu.edu/depts-vth/smallAnimalServices.aspx, or subscribe to the online newsletter at www.vetmed.wsu.edu/depts-vth/newsletters. Also feel free to call 509-335-0711 for **veterinary appointments** or **emergency care**.

POTTY TRAINING | *continued from page 4*

silly, but when he is let outside, he knows to go to the side of the house where his potty area is designated.”

Another important element when potty training a puppy is to expect mistakes. Owners should avoid punishing their dogs when this happens because dogs forget what they have done within a few seconds of their “accident” and probably won’t realize why they are being punished, yelled at, or why their nose is being rubbed in it. This can be especially true for puppies that squat and urinate upon greeting an owner, which is referred to as “nervous wetting.” Puppies that do this are often very sensitive in the first place, and punishment or yelling can create anxiety for the dog and may even make the problem worse.

“If you catch a puppy as it begins to urinate in the house, definitely say ‘no’ to try to put the brakes on,” Dr. Mickas said. “Then immediately take the puppy outside and wait patiently using your command phrase for them to go. Give them lots of positive reinforcement when they are finished.”

For “nervous wetters,” it can be helpful to remain calm and quiet during greetings, and ask them to sit for a treat when someone greets them. Patience is a virtue when potty training a dog, but most dogs will outgrow bad potty behavior with appropriate training. “The worst mistake owners can make is to give a puppy inconsistent or mixed messages,” Dr. Mickas said. “That will only serve to confuse a dog and prolong the process. This not only can be frustrating for the owner, but the puppy as well that is trying to learn the correct behavior.”

For more information about house training a dog, vaccination schedules for puppies, or finding a local puppy training course, contact the Community Practice Service at WSU’s Veterinary Teaching Hospital at 509-335-0711. Look for more puppy training tips regarding teething and chewing, walking on a leash, barking, whining, and introducing new puppies to little family members and other pets in the house in the next issue of the Community Practice Newsletter, coming this summer.

WSU Continuing Education Opportunities for veterinarians and veterinary technicians

(www.vetmed.wsu.edu/ce)

WSU is currently offering a one-hour online course for veterinarians and veterinary technicians:
“Beyond NSAIDs: What Can We Do to Treat Chronic Pain?”

by Dr. Tammy Grubb.

See www.vetmed.wsu.edu/ce/pain for details.

WSU is offering another one-hour online course for veterinarians called “The Dos and Don’ts of Compounding Veterinary Drugs”

by Dr Katrina Mealey.

See www.vetmed.wsu.edu/ce/compounding for details.

In addition, two more continuing education opportunities are available:

Small Animal Dermatology Topics

by Dr. James O. Noxon, Saturday, April 3, 2010, in Spokane, WA.

See www.vetmed.wsu.edu/ce/programs/derm2010.aspx for details

20th Annual Small Animal Endoscopy Workshops

by Dr. Todd Tams, May 21–26, 2010, in Pullman, WA.

See www.vetmed.wsu.edu/ce/endoscopy for details.

Grieving? You don’t have to be alone

Have you lost a beloved animal companion? Perhaps you know someone who has. The WSU College of Veterinary Medicine has a Pet Loss Hotline for those who would like to reach out for a caring listener. In addition, WSU’s Pet Memorial Program offers families a wonderful way to memorialize and celebrate the life of their pet while supporting the education of future veterinary care providers.

To contact the Pet Loss Hotline, call 509-335-5704 or email plhl@vetmed.wsu.edu.

For more information about the WSU Pet Memorial Program or to make a donation, contact Tim Osborn at 509-335-9516 or tosborn@vetmed.wsu.edu. Information can also be found online at www.vetmed.wsu.edu/depts-prd/memorial.aspx.

Welcoming a new kitten and tips for turning them into great cats

Good things come in small packages, including kittens. With proper care and some preparation, the experience of owning a cat can be a joy for years to come.

Before bringing one home, owners should spend some time planning out where they want the kitten to learn to go potty, where the food bowl should be, and providing a safe and secure area for the pet to be in for the first several days to get it used to being in a new house. This may sound easy enough, but if older dogs or cats are already in the home, strategic planning may be required to keep the peace as the animals get acquainted, which can take up to several weeks.

“Kittens should be introduced gradually through the use of a crate or kennel so that the other pets can explore the new arrival. The new kitten should not be allowed to go directly into the other’s territory right away,” said Dr. Matthew Mickas, a WSU Community Practice veterinarian. “Also, provide multiple feeding areas for the animals to eat and only gradually move food bowls together over time to avoid potential conflicts. Pets should be supervised when together in the beginning, but expect some barking, posturing, growling, and hissing. This is their way of communicating and is a learning process for all involved, including the owner, as relationships are established. Some pets, especially older cats, can be very nurturing toward kittens and others are unappreciative, to say the least, of a new housemate.

“Have reasonable expectations for how your pets will get along,” he said. “You can’t force a dog or cat to get along with a kitten, but a safe environment must be maintained as they become acquainted. Unfortunately, not all pets will become ‘best buddies,’ but they should at least peacefully coexist in your home.”

Litter box training

When first bringing a kitten home, it will likely be scared, so it is a good idea to prepare an isolated room where it can get used to its new surroundings without being injured or running away. New cats should not be allowed to roam the house alone or be let outside until it is familiar with its new environment. Include a litter box, food and water dishes, toys, and a pet bed in this area, but don’t put the litter box next to the food dish as a cat will likely not eliminate near where it eats. Also make sure the box is low enough for the kitten to climb into, and that it is not placed next to something like a washing machine or other appliance that buzzes or makes sudden noises.

“Fortunately, most kittens don’t have a problem with learning to eliminate in the right place, but it is essential to have a clean litter pan (multiple pans) with fresh litter in it for them to use. Show them where the litter pan is located by placing them in the litter pan and that they always have stress-free, undisturbed access,” Dr. Mickas said.

If a cat is completely unfamiliar with a litter box, an owner can help by playing with the kitten near the litter box after it has recently eaten a meal. The owner can lead the kitten to the box and move the clean litter around with a litter scooper to encourage its interest. (Pregnant women are advised to avoid cat litter and changing the litter box.) It may take a little time, but eventually the kitten will figure out what to do. Once the kitten



has roam of the house, be sure to provide one more litter box throughout the house than there are cats.

Feeding

Another essential topic to address for a kitten is what, where, and how often to feed it. “Obesity is the number one nutritional problem for both dogs and cats,” Dr. Mickas said. “To help prevent this, provide the kitten with several scheduled meals during the day, rather than providing a bottomless dish of cat food that it can eat out of at any time. This can be a challenge with our busy lives, but will help with the overall health of your cat.”

Kittens less than six months old can be fed three or four times a day. Older cats can be fed two meals each day with unlimited fresh water. Kittens can be fed dry food or a mixture of canned and dry food. Be sure that the volume fed is reasonable and in accordance with label recommendations. Pay attention to the cat’s body condition and adjust the volume fed or the type of food (“indoor” or “reduced calorie” foods) as needed.

In addition, provide every pet in the house with its own dish. Cats do best with shallow, broad-based bowls.

Exercise, toys, and scratching

Kittens are often rambunctious and love to play. Without littermates, kittens rely on their new family for playtime and bonding, or enriching toys that can keep them occupied.

“Vertical cat scratching posts and corrugated cardboard pads with catnip are some of my cats’ favorites,” Dr. Mickas said. “They also like toy balls with bells in them that they love to chase on the stairs. The cats also love chasing ribbons, but these are only used for supervised play (nothing that they can swallow). The key is, despite our busy lives, to interact with your cat with toys on a daily basis.”

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Even though a kitten's claws are not very big, a favorite and natural activity can be scratching. This can be a problem if they choose to scratch on furniture or people.

"We really discourage people from using their hands or other parts of their body as 'toys' for kittens," Dr. Mickas said. "Some owners like to tap their fingers to get their cat to come, or wiggle their feet, but kittens should not be encouraged to play like this. You don't want them to become aggressive with people, especially those that aren't expecting it, and some cats can be more aggressive than others. There are plenty of appropriate toys available, such as ribbons, catnip balls, and scratching pads that are a better alternative."

A kitten's nails can also be trimmed to help with undesirable scratching behavior. "Especially while they are young, owners can get a cat used to having their nails trimmed," Dr. Mickas said. "Nail trimmers can be found at pet stores and owners can do the trimming themselves, but a veterinarian or veterinary technician can show an owner how to do this at a veterinary checkup when the kitten goes in for vaccination."

A kitten may also nibble at things around the house for entertainment, including plants. Some plants are toxic to cats. Easter lilies, ivy, azaleas, and dieffenbachias are just some of those known to cause problems and possibly death if a cat ingests them. To be safe, owners can check with a veterinarian for a list of toxic plants and may want to consider getting rid of such plants or placing them out of reach.



Deciding to let a cat out of the house

A big decision for a feline pet owner can be deciding whether or not to let a kitten outdoors to play. Cats that go outdoors may become lost or run into strange dogs or predators, traffic, and other cats that may carry infectious diseases. In the Palouse, outdoor cats may also bring home ticks if they are not properly protected.

If a cat is allowed outside, be sure that tick protection is applied during tick season and that its vaccines are up to date. Owners should let their veterinarians know if their cat goes outdoors so the most appropriate vaccine protocol can be chosen and a microchip for identification can be placed. Indoor cats usually do not need a vaccine for feline leukemia, but outdoor cats may be considered at risk. Intestinal parasites may also be more prevalent in outdoor cats, and a veterinarian can recommend an appropriate deworming schedule as well. In addition, all pet owners are advised to spay and neuter their pets.

"Cats can be of breeding age and experience their first heat cycles at about 6-9 months of age, depending

on the seasonality. During a breeding season, females will have multiple heat cycles unless they are either bred or spayed," Dr. Mickas said. "Our best recommendation is to keep cats indoors and to have them spayed or neutered. If household considerations determine that it is best for a cat to have time outdoors, then precautions should be taken to maximize the cat's health and limit risk exposure."

Springtime pet tips

Spaying and neutering pets—

Spring is breeding time for many animals, and might be a good time to consider spaying or neutering pets if owners have not done so already. There are many benefits from spaying and neutering pets. Sterilization surgery reduces pet overpopulation and often makes animals easier to live with. The procedure eliminates their urge to urinate on furniture and other objects, keeps them from roaming in times of peak fertility, and generally makes them more docile and devoted to their owners.

The recommended time to spay and neuter either dogs or cats is approximately five to six months of age after they have received a final round of vaccinations at approximately four months of age. For more information or to schedule an appointment, contact the small animal appointment desk in the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital at 509-335-0751.

Flea and tick prevention—

The arrival of spring also means the arrival of tick season on the Palouse. Luckily, this area does not usually have a flea problem. But when the weather warms enough for the grass to start to grow, it is a good idea to protect pets from ticks, especially if

they visit grassy, bushy, or timbered areas. Usually in this region, tick prevention should begin in March, but with a mild winter, it may be necessary to protect pets even earlier. Tick prevention should continue to be applied until October or November when freezing conditions occur.

A number of preventative treatments are available. Contact us at the Community Practice at 509-335-0711 with any questions about which treatments are most suitable for your pet.

Abandoned wildlife—

Sometimes, people come upon seemingly abandoned young wildlife, such as chicks, bunnies, squirrel pups, and raccoon cubs. Many times, these animals are not abandoned and are much better off if left alone. Most animals do not spend every waking minute with their young. Doing so would soon attract predators and cause malnutrition for the mother. For instance, doe rabbits spend only about one hour with their kits in a day, and mostly after dark. Contrary to popular belief, most animals will not abandon their young just because of human scent. It is also not a

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good idea to try and feed or give water to newborn animals. Many times, the animal will drown or be fed the wrong food. If you find a young animal and are not sure if it is abandoned or if it has an injury, please call the WSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital at 509-335-0711. Our specially trained staff in the Exotics and Wildlife Service will help you determine if the animal is truly an orphan and if it needs to be brought to the hospital.

Allergies—

Springtime is the start of allergy season for both humans and pets. Clinical signs of allergies in pets include chewing, licking, head shaking, and scratching. If your pet is experiencing these signs, call us for an appointment.

Holiday plants and food—

Certain springtime flowers and plants can be toxic to pets. Of special note are Easter lilies, which are very toxic and can be fatal if ingested. Check with us for a list of these plants and what to do in case of poisoning. If you suspect poisoning, contact the WSU Community Practice immediately.

If you buy treats for your family during the holidays, it may be a good idea to remember your pets too and provide a special chew toy or treats to help keep them out of plants and food (such as chocolate) and stay busy during activities such as Easter egg hunts.

Health checkups—

If you have not taken your pet to the veterinarian within the past year, spring is a great time to schedule a visit. Pets are often outside more during the spring and summer months and are more likely to encounter animals that spread disease. Vaccinations help, too. Feel free to contact us for a veterinary checkup today.

Dental care—

Oral care is an important part of keeping pets healthy. Annual physical examinations and regular dental cleanings by a veterinarian are important to identify and prevent dental diseases. Pet owners can also learn how to examine their pets' mouths for signs of dental problems.



To keep a pet's teeth healthy at home, owners can brush their pet's teeth, feed a dental-formulated diet, and give their pets dental chews to prevent plaque from building above the gum line. Owners can also apply OraVet Plaque Prevention Gel TM, recommended by the WSU Community Practice, to help prevent plaque and tartar buildup above and below the gum line. For brushing tips and other dental care information for pets, contact the Community Practice or look online at the American Animal Hospital Association's dental care guidelines for dogs and cats at www.healthypet.com

Pet identification—

The American Veterinary Medical Association urges all pet owners to have their pets permanently identified. Collars and tags have their place, but microchips are the only permanent, positive form of pet identification available today. About the size of a grain of rice and inserted under the skin with a needle, microchips provide a unique code that matches owners to their animals should the animals become lost or stolen. Finally, consider more than one type of identification, too. Tags get lost, microchips occasionally migrate, and tattoos can fade. But taken together, redundant identification is probably best. To learn more about inexpensive microchip identification, or for recommendations on how to best identify your pet, contact us at the Community Practice Service at 509-335-0711