



Is Your Vet a Cautious or Casual Vaccinator?

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By Dr. Becker

Today I have another very special guest chatting with me via Skype. Many of you already know or have heard of Dr. Jean Dodds. Dr. Dodds gives lectures all over the world on a variety of veterinary topics including clinical pathology, hematology, blood banking, immunology, endocrinology, nutrition, and holistic medicine.

In 1986, Dr. Dodds created a non-profit animal blood bank called [Hemopet](#), which set the standard for veterinary transfusion medicine. She also created [Pet Life-Line](#), a greyhound rescue and adoption program. Hemopet rescues retired racing greyhounds, and they then donate lifesaving blood periodically for 12 to 18 months. After that, Pet Life-Line adopts them out to families or places them into foster care for future adoption.

Dr. Dodds also formed [Hemolife Diagnostics](#) at the same time. Hemolife is a division of Hemopet that provides high quality, full-service laboratory diagnostics and expert interpretation of results.

Like Dr. Barbara Royal, who I interviewed on Monday, Dr. Dodds is a member of the board of the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Foundation (AHVMF).

Educating veterinarians and pet owners about vaccine adverse reactions.

The theme of this year's AHVM Foundation [Be One in a Million](#) fundraising campaign is "Advancing Research and Education in Holistic Veterinary Medicine."

There's a significant difference between holistic and traditional veterinary viewpoints toward immunology and vaccines, so I asked Dr. Dodds for her perspective.

Dr. Dodds explained that vaccination programs have traditionally been the holy grail of veterinary medicine. Vaccine schedules were a way to assure our clients would bring their pets in to see us at least once a year, at which time we'd get the opportunity to do wellness exams, discuss pet owner concerns, and practice preventive medicine. And of course, there's always been a huge push by the vaccine industry to promote yearly vaccinations.

Unfortunately, as Dr. Dodds points out, veterinarians aren't told much about vaccine adverse reaction rates. The problem is typically downplayed or even denied. Even when an animal becomes sick shortly after receiving a vaccination, most vets don't think to link the two things together because they are so accustomed to giving vaccines.

Since holistic veterinarians are so acutely aware of the potential dangers of vaccines, I asked Dr. Dodds why it is that the veterinary community as a whole is still so reluctant to accept the data as fact and convey it to the public. Why do vaccine-related reactions and diseases still feel like a well-kept secret?

Dr. Dodds believes the profession is still in denial despite the fact that evidence has been accumulating for at least two decades. Her opinion is that the peer-reviewed literature most DVMs use doesn't contain much information on vaccine adverse reactions, whereas research immunology literature does. It seems only the occasional horrible adverse reaction – for example, tumors that form at the site of rabies vaccinations (called [vaccine-associated sarcomas](#)) – gets out to the veterinary community as a whole.


Story at-a-glance

- ▷ Dr. Jean Dodds, of Hemopet and Hemolife, and board member of the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Foundation (AHVMF) talks with Dr. Becker via Skype about pet vaccines, the exciting field of nutrigenomics, and the AHVMF.
- ▷ Vaccination programs have traditionally been the holy grail of veterinary medicine. But the truth is veterinarians aren't well informed about vaccine adverse reaction rates. Dr. Dodds believes the veterinary profession is still in denial about vaccine dangers despite evidence that has been accumulating for at least two decades.
- ▷ Another area of opportunity for vaccinations is with the informed consent of pet owners. Do you know for sure which vaccines your pet actually needs and which ones she's receiving?
- ▷ Dr. Dodds is also very involved in the exciting field of nutrigenomics. Did you know the nutrients you feed your pet affect his genes, and therefore, his health and longevity? In fact, when we know which nutrients are essential for individual pets, we have the potential to impact longevity, reduce the risk of chronic disease, and speed healing.
- ▷ Between now and March 17, 2013, every \$1 donated to the AHVM Foundation will be automatically tripled. That's right – Marcola Healthy Pets will contribute \$2 for every \$1 donation to the foundation from March 11 through March 17, 2013.


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Dr. Dodds feels the holistic veterinary community needs to document more case studies of adverse reactions and do cohort reports so that DVMs have access to information about predisposing factors that increase vaccine risks for certain pets.

I asked Dr. Dodds if she feels the vaccine industry fails to inform veterinarians about the duration of immunity from disease, as well as local and regional differences.

She absolutely believes the industry does fail in this regard. Vaccine sales reps are the people DVMs most often see, and it's their job to promote vaccines and other products made by their companies.

Dr. Dodds feels vaccine companies make excellent products, but they aren't one-size-fits-all. Each animal is an individual, with genetic, nutritional and physiological differences from every other animal. Dr. Dodds questions why anyone would expect a vaccine "... with its combo-wombo mixture of antigens and other factors in there – tissue culture remnants, fetal calf serum remnants, adjuvants if it's a killed product – why would you expect all animals to be able to handle that equally?"

As Dr. Dodds points out, since the testing of vaccines is performed primarily in controlled laboratory situations and a very small number of field studies, it's impossible to reproduce the kinds of reactions we see in the real world. Vaccine supporters estimate adverse reactions at about one to three percent of the total. Dr. Dodds believes that estimate is low and the real number is closer to five to nine percent. But even at one to three percent, with millions and millions of vaccines given yearly, that's still a lot of animals suffering adverse reactions.

The way to end most of the suffering while still protecting pets from potentially deadly vaccine-associated diseases is to adopt appropriate vaccination protocols with a less-is-more approach.

Why repeated boosters of core vaccines are not only unnecessary, but also potentially dangerous to your pet's health.

Recently, there have been a few pets that have become infected with adenovirus. Now, I've never even seen a case of adenovirus in my practice, so I asked Dr. Dodds to help us understand what's going on. We're already seeing frightened pet owners demanding additional vaccinations against the virus.

According to Dr. Dodds, this is a very controversial issue. But she wants to remind everyone that it's the wildlife adenovirus 1 we're talking about -- a virus that causes infectious canine hepatitis, which is a serious disease. This is not adenovirus 2, the kennel cough complex component that we vaccinate against to protect pets from getting adenovirus 1. Adenovirus 1 has historically been reported only in very limited areas like Alaska and the Yukon, for example.

Dr. Dodds says that what happened recently, and tragically, is a litter of Rhodesian Ridgeback puppies contracted adenovirus 1 from wildlife in the Maritimes (in the New England area around the Canadian border). This immediately caused a huge panic because of the virulence of the adenovirus 1 strain.

As Dr. Dodds explains, U.S. vaccination guidelines call for the core CAV-2 vaccine to protect against CAV-1 (adenovirus 1). The CAV-2 is typically delivered as a combo vaccine along with distemper and parvo.

Some of Dr. Dodds colleagues, including [Dr. Ronald Schultz](#), feel the CAV-2 is indeed a core vaccine that should be given with the other cores for distemper and parvo. However, Dr. Dodds is adamantly opposed to this approach, because studies show the combination of the three vaccines suppresses a puppy's immune system for up to 10 days. Her reasoning for not giving the CAV-2 is that since adenovirus 1 hasn't been seen in years in North America in domesticated animals (until the recent incident with the Rhodesian Ridgeback puppies), why risk suppressing the developing immune systems of every young puppy?

Dr. Dodds believes that with the appearance of adenovirus 1 in the Maritimes, if you live in or visit the New England area and your dog could be exposed to potentially infected wildlife, you can add CAV-2 vaccines – two doses for puppies, and then re-vaccinate adult dogs as needed based on hepatitis titers.

Since hepatitis titers are expensive, another approach would be to titer for distemper and parvo, since those tests aren't expensive, to see how the dog's immune system is functioning. If the animal remains protected against distemper and parvo, he's probably protected against adenovirus, too, because his immune system is working well.

For dogs living in areas where adenovirus 1 is prevalent – Alaska and the Yukon, for example – Dr. Dodds brings up an intriguing alternative to the CAV-2 proposed by Dr. Schultz: Give intranasal kennel cough vaccines, which include CAV-2, to dogs with high risk of exposure, to help protect against CAV-1. Dr. Dodds feels this could be a viable alternative to giving high-risk pets repeated CAV-2 vaccines, especially since the CAV-2 is combined with the other two cores and can't be purchased as a single vaccine.

When we re-vaccinate against CAV-2 via injection, we are also re-vaccinating unnecessarily against parvo and distemper. Unnecessary vaccines increase your dog's toxic load as well as the potential for short- and long-term adverse reactions.

How much do pet owners really understand about the vaccinations their furry family members receive?

Next I asked Dr. Dodds to talk about pet owners giving informed consent to have their animals vaccinated. DVMs are taught in vet school to discuss vaccinations with their clients – presumably the benefits AND the risks – but I wanted Dr. Dodds to share her opinion on whether people are truly being informed, and if not, why not.

Dr. Dodds believes it's critical that pet owners understand the pros and cons of vaccinating their companion animals. The key is to get local veterinarians to understand informed consent is essential. They DO need to talk to their clients about potential adverse reactions. They DON'T need to re-vaccinate (give "boosters") automatically. Maybe a titer is necessary instead. In fact, Dr. Dodds would recommend lots more titers for distemper and parvo for adult dogs.

To pet owners, veterinarians are medical experts. So the vet says your dog or cat needs a vaccination, you give consent, and the vet gives your pet a seven-way booster. Did you realize you were giving your consent to seven vaccines? Vaccines for diseases that perhaps aren't prevalent in your area and/or diseases your pet is already protected against?

Dr. Dodds feels we need to educate pet owners as well about appropriate vaccination of puppies, kittens and other baby animals. Once a young animal is appropriately vaccinated and immunized, further vaccinations aren't necessary. And there are regions of the country where we don't need to ever give certain vaccines – leptospirosis, for example, or the Lyme vaccine.

Nutrigenomics and customized functional nutrition for pets.

I asked Dr. Dodds to talk about her work in nutrigenomics, which is the study of the effects of foods and food components on gene expression. It's such an exciting field.

Dr. Dodds responded that the bottom line is this: wholesome nutrition is the key to a healthy immune system and resistance to disease, whether we're talking vaccine reactions or any other immunological challenge that pets and their humans are exposed to every day.

Since nutrition is the key, we obviously must balance nutrition. Since about 2002, nutrigenomics has been an emerging scientific concept that holds that the nutrition we need as individuals depends on our genetic makeup. Our genes and the expression of our genes are controlled by individual nutrients, which means we need personalized, individualized functional nutrition.

It's important to understand how the nutrients we feed our pets will affect their genes, and therefore, their health and longevity. And in fact, if we know which nutrients are essential for individual pets (and people), we can impact longevity, reduce the risk of chronic disease, and heal from illness much more rapidly.

Nutrigenomics studies the affect of nutrition on the genome. The genome is everything to do with the body – how it functions metabolically and genetically. The genes are only a small part of the genome, about two percent. The other 98 percent has nothing to do with the genes, but with how the body controls what our genes do.

Every individual has a unique molecular dietary signature that determines which nutrients that individual should eat in order to thrive. As veterinarians and pet owners, we can exert some control. For example, if your pet is a breed genetically predisposed to a certain health problem, through nutrition we can suppress certain genes so they don't express themselves, or encourage other genes to do the opposite.

According to Dr. Dodds, there are a few pet diets available today that incorporate some of the principles of nutrigenomics – they are mostly geared toward joint health, weight management and liver support. These are "prescription diets" in the truest sense, and Dr. Dodds has personally witnessed their power:

"When you actually look at some of the diets experimentally, doing what we call heat maps (DNA or RNA microarray), you will see the enzymes that are turned on, upregulated, and pro-inflammatory initially in a patient with a particular disease. When you treat them with the appropriate food and functional botanicals as necessary, those activated enzyme profiles will go down and will cleanse."

And so the body will be healed.

The AHVM Foundation's role in supporting vaccine studies and therapeutic diets for animals.

I asked Dr. Dodds to talk a little about how the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Foundation can help further understanding and knowledge of some of the things we discussed here today.

Dr. Dodds reiterated that when it comes to vaccines, we clearly need to gather more data and specify the parameters -- at a clinical research level -- that predispose certain pets to adverse reactions.

In the area of nutrition, she feels the Foundation has a wonderful opportunity to explore the field of nutrigenomics and therapeutic diets for animals.

Many thanks to the very busy Dr. Jean Dodds for joining me today for a fascinating conversation!

How you can make a difference.