

Veterinary Care Fact Sheet

Pets make great companions, provide unconditional love and loyalty, and can easily become an important member of your family. Just one visit a year to your local veterinarian will help to keep your pet in good health for years to come, and helps to prevent the onset of various diseases

Top Five Ways an Annual Veterinary Visit Keeps Your Pet Healthy

1. Ensuring Your Pet is Protected from Disease

While rabies prevention is important to protect both animal and human health, you can protect your pet against a variety of other diseases by ensuring that it is vaccinated at appropriate intervals.

Vaccines available for dogs include Rabies, Distemper, Hepatitis, Parainfluenza, Parvo virus, Leptospirosis, Lyme Disease, Corona virus and Bordetella.

Vaccines available for cats include Rabies, Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, Panleukopenia, Chlamydia and Leukemia.

Speak with your veterinarian to find out which ones they recommend for your pet.

2. Protecting Your Pet from Parasites

There are a variety of parasites that can adversely affect your pet's health:

Heartworm is a blood parasite that poses a health threat to pets in Ontario. Heartworms are large worms that live in the heart and the blood vessels that supply the lungs. They can grow to a length of 15 to 30 centimetres. In severe cases, a pet may be infested with hundreds of worms. They damage the heart, lungs and liver. When damage to the internal organs is severe enough, death may result.

Heartworms are spread from infected pets to uninfected pets by mosquitoes. Treatment for heartworm disease is available. However, the methods are costly and are not without potential complications. Prevention is the key. A veterinarian can test your pet for heartworm. If the test is negative, your veterinarian will recommend a preventative medication that will destroy any immature heartworms transmitted by mosquitoes and stop the cycle of the disease.

Fleas are the most common external parasites. They cause skin irritation and can transmit some types of tapeworms. Check under your pet's coat for small, black specks on your pet's skin. These specks are the fecal droppings left by fleas. Other possible external parasites include lice, mites and ticks.

Consult your veterinarian if you suspect that your pet has fleas or any other external parasite. There are a variety of convenient, safe and effective methods to control these pests.

Other potential parasites include giardia, coccidia, hookworms, roundworms, tapeworms and whipworms. Consult your veterinarian about having your pet's stool analyzed to detect if any of these parasites are present.

3. Early Disease Detection

Annual veterinary visits are important because they provide an opportunity to prevent diseases, detect them early, or avoid them altogether. Unfortunately, many pet owners underestimate the



value of these visits because their pets appear to be healthy. However, this may be deceiving, since many diseases and ailments, such as dental disease or a heart murmur, are often not evident in the early stages. Cats are also experts at hiding their illnesses, making it even more challenging to identify if they are not well.

4. Obesity/Nutritional Counselling

Proper nutrition is key to overall pet health. A balanced diet will not only help your pet look great, but it can also assist in the prevention and management of many diseases. Your veterinarian also uses the annual examination to determine whether or not your pet has an obesity problem. Obesity affects almost one out of every three pets. It is the most common nutritional disease amongst dogs and cats. Through visual assessment and palpation, your veterinarian can advise on whether or not your pet would benefit from a weight-reduction program.

5. Help with Behavioural Problems

The check-up also provides you with the opportunity to ask questions about training and hygiene. Obedience training is important for your pet's health because behavioural problems account for more deaths in dogs than any known disease. In fact, a well-trained and obedient dog is more likely to live to a ripe old age than a poorly trained one.

What Happens During An Examination?

Before the physical examination begins, your veterinarian asks you questions concerning your pet's health. This is important to determine whether there are problem areas that need to be addressed. For example, a "history" of poor weight gain or weight loss can provide a clue to your veterinarian that a health problem may be starting. Puppies may be showing signs of parasites. Older dogs may be in the early stages of diabetes or kidney disease. With laboratory testing of your dog's stool, blood and/or urine, your veterinarian is able to detect the presence of these ailments.

After obtaining a history, your veterinarian performs a physical examination of your pet. Your veterinarian will examine your dog's eyes, ears, face, and mouth. Examining the teeth is especially important. As many as 80 percent of all dogs and cats that are more than three years of age have some degree of dental disease.

Your veterinarian will also examine your pet's coat, looking for signs of parasites (such as fleas). They will also ensure that the coat is not too dry or too oily. Your veterinarian will also check your pet's weight. If the pet is too heavy, a change in diet may be required to avoid health problems related to obesity. If the pet is losing weight over time, it could be a sign that the pet has a related medical problem that needs further examination.

To learn more about the many benefits of a physical examination of your pet, talk to your veterinarian. If you don't already have a relationship with a local veterinarian, find out which clinics are in your area and make an appointment to take a tour and meet their staff. Establishing a relationship with a veterinarian who knows your pet's history can be invaluable in the event of an emergency or the onset of illness. And all it takes is one visit a year!

