Physical Examination and Canine Distemper Combination Vaccine

- Regular physical examinations are essential to maintaining canine health.
- A thorough physical examination checks every major body system.
- Annual vaccine risk assessments can help ensure that your pet is properly immunized against infectious diseases.
- The canine distemper vaccine is typically given in some variation of a combination vaccine that also protects your pet from several other serious diseases, such as parvovirus infection.
- Many of the diseases that are prevented by this combination vaccine have no effective treatment other than supportive care; however, vaccination can prevent these diseases or minimize the signs of illness.
- Other vaccines, such as the rabies and *Bordetella* vaccines, may be given in addition to the canine distemper/parvo combination vaccine.

**Why Are Physical Examinations Important?**

Regular physical examinations are essential to maintaining your dog’s health. A thorough examination checks every major body organ and system:

- **Eyes** – The eyes will be checked for cloudiness, redness, or discharge that could indicate a problem.
- **Ears** – Many pets develop ear infections. Your veterinarian will examine your pet’s ear canals for possible signs of an ear problem, including debris, growths, waxy buildup, or trauma caused by scratching.
- **Mouth** – Your veterinarian will visually examine your pet’s mouth to look for signs of dental disease and for broken or missing teeth. If any problems are detected, your veterinarian may recommend a thorough dental examination and cleaning for your pet.
- **Respiratory system** – Your veterinarian will listen to your pet’s heart and lungs.
- **Digestive system** – Your veterinarian will palpate (feel) your pet’s abdomen for signs of discomfort and to check that the major organs are the right size and shape.
- **Musculoskeletal system** – Your veterinarian will palpate your pet’s major muscles and bones to check for signs of weakness or pain.
- **Skin and haircoat** – Your veterinarian will check all of your pet’s “lumps and bumps.” If anything suspicious is found, a biopsy or lump removal may be recommended.
- **Laboratory tests** – During a routine examination, your veterinarian may also want to check your pet’s blood, urine, and feces to obtain additional information about your pet’s health or to help ensure that specific body systems are functioning properly.

During your pet’s examination, your veterinarian will ask you many questions about your pet’s behavior, lifestyle, and health history since your last visit. The answers to these questions will help your veterinarian determine what preventive care recommendations he or she should make to help keep your pet healthy.
What Is a Canine Distemper Combination Vaccine?

While commonly called canine distemper vaccination, this vaccine typically protects your pet against more than just distemper. That’s because it is actually a combination of vaccines in one injection that will protect your pet from several serious diseases.

Canine distemper is considered a core vaccine. This means that, because canine distemper is a serious, highly contagious disease with a high death rate, organized veterinary medicine has determined that all dogs should be protected from this disease.

The exact combination of your dog’s distemper combination vaccine depends on your dog’s age and individual disease-risk profile, but in general, most distemper combination vaccines protect against canine distemper, canine adenovirus-2 infection (hepatitis and respiratory disease), canine parvovirus infection, and parainfluenza. The abbreviation for this combination vaccine is frequently written as “DHPPV,” “DHPP,” “DA2PP,” or “DA2PPV” on your pet’s health records. The letters in these abbreviations are defined as follows:

• **D** = Canine distemper virus. Infection with this virus is serious, with a death rate approaching 50% in untreated dogs. The virus attacks the respiratory, digestive, and brain/nervous systems of dogs.

• **H** = Hepatitis. This vaccine protects against canine adenovirus-2 and adenovirus-1 and is often referred to as A2. Canine adenovirus-1 causes canine infectious hepatitis, a serious disease that affects the liver. Canine adenovirus-2 causes respiratory disease and is one of the infectious agents commonly associated with canine infectious tracheobronchitis, also known as kennel cough.

• **A2** = Canine adenovirus-2. This virus causes a respiratory disease in dogs (see above).

• **P** = Parvovirus. Infection with this virus is highly contagious and serious, with a death rate approaching 90% in untreated dogs. The virus attacks the digestive and immune systems of unvaccinated animals, causing debilitating diarrhea and vomiting.

• **P** = Parainfluenza. Infection with this virus causes mild respiratory viral disease in dogs.

• **V** = Virus.

Therefore, a notation of “DA2PPV,” “DA2PP,” “DHPP,” or “DHPPV” in your pet’s vaccination record generally means that your pet was vaccinated against canine distemper, hepatitis (canine adenovirus-2 and -1), parvovirus, and parainfluenza.

Other Distemper Combination Vaccines

Depending on your dog’s individual disease risk, which includes your dog’s age (puppy, adult, or senior) and lifestyle (active and outdoors or primarily indoors), your pet’s combination vaccine may protect against additional diseases. Some of these vaccines are considered noncore, meaning they are optional and only recommended for pets with certain exposure risks, or “not recommended,” meaning that widespread use is not generally recommended.

The “C” in “DA2PPV-C” and the “L” in “DA2PPV-L” are defined as follows:

• **C** = Coronavirus. This causes a highly contagious viral disease in dogs. The disease typically affects the intestinal tract of dogs, causing vomiting and diarrhea. Vaccination against this virus is categorized as “not recommended” but may be advised in areas where coronavirus is very common.

• **L** = Leptospirosis. This potentially serious bacterial disease attacks the kidneys and liver of infected dogs and can be transmitted to humans. Vaccination against this disease is considered noncore but may be recommended in areas where leptospirosis is common.

Bordetella bronchiseptica

*Bordetella bronchiseptica* is a bacterium that causes respiratory disease in dogs. It is one of the most common bacterial causes of canine infectious tracheobronchitis, which is also sometimes called kennel cough. *Bordetella* is highly contagious, easily transmitted through direct contact or the air, and resistant to destruction in the environment. While not considered to be core, *Bordetella* vaccination
may be recommended for dogs whose lifestyle places them at greater risk of contracting the disease. This includes dogs that are boarded frequently or that regularly visit grooming parlors or dog parks. Based on your dog’s risk for exposure, your veterinarian may recommend vaccinating your dog against *Bordetella* in addition to administering the canine distemper combination vaccine.

**Rabies**

Rabies is a nearly 100% fatal disease of mammals. Because there is no effective treatment and the disease can also infect humans, vaccination against the rabies virus is required by law in most states. Typically, the rabies vaccine is administered to pets in a separate injection at the same time as the canine distemper combination vaccine. However, the rabies vaccine can also be given alone (at a separate visit) or at the same time as other vaccines (such as the Lyme disease vaccine). Rabies is considered to be a core vaccine for dogs.

It is important to remember that vaccination is a medical procedure and you should follow your veterinarian’s instructions on how to monitor your pet for signs of a reaction. Although rare, they can occur.