ANIMAL CARE CLINIC OF PINGREE GROVE Newsletter Volume 4

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PREVENTATIVE AND WELLNESS CARE (more than just shots!)

Our goal with preventative medicine is to prevent disease and maintain wellness. As with most things, preventing diseases or early identification of diseases generally works out better than dealing with diseases after they have become established or progressed in their course. There are several areas we focus on to help prevent or identify diseases such as heartworm infection, parasites, Rabies, Lyme disease, and periodontal disease to name a few. Vaccines or "shots" are one method of preventing or reducing the risk of specific infections - but not the only method. Screening tests play a significant role in disease identification, mitigation, and surveillance. Also, preventative medications are available to help prevent specific diseases. Special considerations are given to puppies and kittens to help ensure they get off to the best start possible. Again, preventing disease and maintaining "wellness" is generally better, safer, cheaper, easier, and more comfortable than dealing with those diseases after they have already become established.

SCREENING TESTS

- **PHYSICAL EXAM**
  - **A physical exam is the most cost-effective and efficient "test" available to pet owners to screen for and identify or rule out diseases.** The value and benefit of a properly performed physical exam can not be overstated. During a physical exam the veterinary team evaluates information gained from discussion and review of a patient's history, assessment of a patient's signalment (age, breed, etc.), and physical exam findings to very quickly rule in or out many common conditions. Conditions such as periodontal disease (mouth infection), obesity, arthritis, and allergic dermatitis are often diagnosed and discussed including any further evaluation recommended, management and prognosis considerations, and options available to a pet owner. Similar to how AI (artificial intelligence) can process information and produce a response (ChatGPT for example), a veterinarian processes all of the information gained from a visit such as physical exam findings, historical information reviewed, and signalment to formulate a diagnosis. There is no more cost effective "test" available than a properly performed physical exam and wellness visit.

- **HEARTWORM TESTING**
  - Heartworm testing is indicated for dogs after 6 months of age. Annual testing is indicated, regardless of heartworm prevention use for the following:
    - Early identification of infection allows for earlier treatment of infection which helps to lessen the damage caused by the infection, risk of death from the infection, or complications associated with treatment as compared with infections that are identified later in the course of infection or when symptoms become evident.
    - No treatments are 100% effective 100% of the time. Treatments can and do fail for a variety of reasons and heartworm prevention treatments are no exception. It is not uncommon for dogs to not receive heartworm preventative medications as prescribed thereby creating "gaps" in protection.
    - With certain heartworm prevention medication options, use in dogs that are infected can lead to harm to the patient which the veterinarian is obligated to prevent from happening in the first place.

SCREENING TESTS CONTINUED

- **FECAL TESTING**
  - Annual fecal testing is indicated for adult cats and dogs. Testing is indicated for the following:
    - GI (gastrointestinal) parasites are common in dogs and cats
    - GI parasites often are present without obvious symptoms or without visual identification in the feces. Specific fecal testing methods are necessary to identify most GI parasites. Tapeworms are the exception to this rule.
    - Some GI parasites can be spread from cats or dogs to the people they live with and cause harm in the people that become infected.
- **FELINE LEUKEMIA TESTING (cats only)**
  - This test is recommended for any newly acquired cat or kitten. Feline leukemia virus is one of the most common viral infections of cats. Determining the status of a cat is important as the status can help guide decision making regarding treatment and testing if a cat becomes ill and to help determine whether a cat should be kept "indoors only" or have access to the outside and other cats.

VACCINATIONS/SHOTS

- Vaccinations effectively prevent common, known threats to dogs and cats as well as preventing public health risks associated with some diseases such as Rabies and Leptospirosis. Vaccines can be divided into "Core" and "Non-core" types.
  - **Core vaccines** are those that are indicated regardless of signalment or lifestyle and in our area include: Rabies, Distemper (DHPP), and Leptospirosis.
    - Rabies vaccine - all dogs and cats must be vaccinated for rabies by 16 weeks of age (12 weeks is the minimum age). The first rabies vaccine legally recognized duration of immunity is 1 year. Following the first rabies dose, subsequent doses can be either with 1 or 3 year rabies vaccines. 3 year Rabies vaccines are generally preferred and recommended for adult dogs and cats after the first dose.
    - Distemper (DHPP) vaccine - This combination vaccine, commonly referred to simply as "Distemper" should be started in puppies and kittens 6 weeks of age or older. Puppies and kittens should receive a booster every 2-4 weeks until a final dose has been given at or after 16 weeks of age. After the second adult booster dose has been given, we typically will then booster this vaccine every 3 years.
    - Leptospirosis vaccine (dogs only) - This vaccine is indicated for dogs to help reduce the risks associated with a bacterial infection known as Leptospirosis. Leptospirosis can potentially be transmitted from infected dogs to the people they live with. For this reason and others Leptospirosis is recommended as a core vaccine.

  - **Non-Core vaccines** are those vaccines that are available and indicated for use if a patient's lifestyle, risk factors, and other considerations justify their use.
    - Feline Leukemia vaccine (cats only) - All cats who test negative for Feline Leukemia virus should be immunized against Feline Leukemia virus. Following the initial immunization (2 doses) the patient's lifestyle and risk factors can be assessed to determine if re-vaccination (2 years after the initial immunization) is indicated. Cats with outdoor access and potential for interactions with other cats should continue this vaccination.
    - Lyme vaccine (dogs only) - Lyme disease is acquired via transmission from a tick bite and is common in the Great Lake states and the Northeastern Atlantic states. Common indications for this vaccine include: inability to provide tick prevention or frequent exposure to areas associated with ticks such as wooded areas.
    - Influenza vaccine (dogs only) - Influenza is commonly indicated for dogs that associate with other dogs in group settings such as kennels, daycare, grooming, or dog parks. Influenza vaccine is required by some facilities. Puppies and elderly dogs have greater potential for complications such as pneumonia associated with Influenza infection and therefore should also be considered for vaccination against Influenza virus.

PREVENTATIVE MEDICATIONS (PARASITICIDES)

- Again as with most things, preventing disease is far better, safer, cheaper, and easier than dealing with disease after it is already established. There are specific diseases which we have the ability to directly prevent. Heartworm infection is deadly in dogs. Diseases that ticks transmit can be very debilitating. Flea allergy dermatitis is still the number one cause of itch. The plague in Europe was due to fleas spreading the bacteria that causes that disease. Some intestinal parasites of dogs and cats can also infect people. Prevention of these diseases is worth the cost and effort.
- Heartworm prevention - Many options are available. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages. Most heartworm preventatives also prevent or mitigate the risks associated with intestinal parasites. Which product you choose and how you use it is your decision. We can help you decide what works best for you. Using an effective heartworm preventative is strongly recommended.
- Flea/tick prevention - Many options are available including topically administered products, chewable tablets, and some collars (not all collars work as advertised). Each has its own advantages and disadvantages. The newer, orally administered flea/tick preventatives, while not labeled for it, effectively eliminate other common external parasites as well.
- Cats - there are very good options for reducing the risks associated with specific parasites cats are commonly exposed to. While indoor cats may be at less risk for internal and external parasites, their risk is not zero. People and other pets can carry parasites inside a home. Fleas seek out the warmth of a home in colder weather. Ticks have been found inside homes. Ear mites are common. Mosquitoes commonly make their way inside a home. Soil for potted plants commonly contains intestinal parasite eggs.
- Other considerations - Any patient with a diagnosis or even a suspicion of allergic dermatitis should receive effective flea prevention. Flea allergy dermatitis is one of the top causes of allergic dermatitis and itch. Use of an effective flea/tick preventative for a patient and their housemates can effectively help to rule out one of three common causes of itch and thereby help ensure treatment efforts for allergic dermatitis and itch are best directed at the specific cause. **Flea/tick prevention use in dogs and cats with allergic dermatitis and/or itch as a symptom is strongly recommended.** Dogs and cats that board at a kennel, attend daycare, or visit a dog park or groomer should receive flea/tick prevention to help reduce the risk of bringing home external parasites. Dogs and cats that have recently been in a shelter or rescue situation should receive flea/tick prevention to minimize the risks associated with prior parasite infection.

PUPPIES AND KITTENS

- Special considerations are given with puppies and kittens regarding preventative medicine.
  - Due to the nature of intestinal parasites and the fecal tests used to detect them, multiple fecal tests are recommended in the first year of life for puppies and kittens. Intestinal parasites don't consistently shed the eggs identified on a fecal test, so we are more likely to detect intestinal parasites when performing multiple tests. Conversely, a single "negative" fecal test result does not definitively rule out intestinal parasites. Puppies and kittens are safely assumed to have intestinal parasites because these parasites are so common in puppies and kittens.
  - Proactively treating - A.K.A "deworming" for intestinal parasites is based on how common intestinal parasites are in puppies and kittens. There are a variety of methods for this approach.
  - Additionally, the preventative medications we use with puppies and kittens also help to eliminate some of the more common internal and external parasites.
  - Physical exams performed when puppies and kittens receive their vaccines are, again, cost effective screening tests intended to prevent or mitigate many of the conditions and behavior issues common with puppies and kittens. At each visit we assess the patient's signalment, history, and exam findings to guide our patients and their people forward towards wellness and starting life off on a good, healthy path forward.