



WVA Position Statement on Animal Vaccination for Advancing Animal and Human Health

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BACKGROUND

Vaccination plays an important role in preventive veterinary medicine, promotion of animal health and welfare, and in reducing the risk of human exposure to many zoonotic pathogens. Historically, immunization practices and vaccination protocols have contributed to significantly reduce the incidence of many life-threatening diseases.

The risks of not vaccinating can be significant to individual animals and populations, and further have consequences on livelihoods of rural livestock producers in developed and developing worlds. The principle of herd immunity recognizes that vaccinating a large percentage of any given population of animals against a specific disease, breaks or slows the chain of transmission of that disease. In addition, vaccination of large populations of animals can be an effective management tool to reduce not only the incidence and severity risk of primary infection but also the incidence and severity of secondary bacterial infections. Effective vaccination programs broadly implemented are likely to decrease reliance on antimicrobials, which in turn will help reduce the risk of emergent antimicrobial resistance.

Vaccinating animals is beneficial to human and public health. Tens of thousands of people die of rabies following bites from infected dogs, annually. However, in communities where vaccination of dogs against rabies is required, vaccinated dogs identified and stray dogs controlled, the incidence of human deaths from canine-transmitted rabies virus is near zero.

As with every medical procedure or treatment, there are potential risks associated with the use of vaccines. The World Veterinary Association (WVA) believes it is incumbent on the global veterinary profession to sensitize and educate the public, particularly animal owners and producers, of the risk-to-benefit ratio of vaccination for animal, human, and public health.

WVA POSITION STATEMENT

- The WVA supports promoting the value of vaccinating animals to reduce the risk of infectious and zoonotic diseases by developing educational materials for use by veterinarians to increase client education surrounding appropriate vaccination programs, and collaborating with other health professions to ensure sufficient resources to advance scientific understanding of vaccine pharmacology and immunology.

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- The WVA believes that the best way to prevent infections is to prevent exposure of animals to pathogens. Sound animal management practices should include high levels of hygiene with appropriate sanitation and disinfection programs. In implementing effective education, sensitization and advocacy when developing vaccination/revaccination protocols for individual animals or groups of animals, veterinarians must consider the age, physiological status, breed and health status of the target animal(s), environment, lifestyle, travel habits and the risk of disease exposure, regional variations in disease prevalence and known adverse events associated with the use of certain vaccines. Adverse events to vaccination can occur as a direct reaction to the vaccine itself or indirectly because of inappropriate transport, storage or use of the vaccine.
- Vaccines have been used for immunologically competent animals for over a century to effectively decrease morbidity and mortality associated with many infectious diseases, and in most cases, the benefits of scientifically sound vaccination programs outweigh potential risks. Vaccination and revaccination programs for preventive health care should be designed to maintain the health of the vaccinated animals and protect human health such as in rabies.
- Herd immunity is an important benefit of effective vaccination programs and can be assessed by measuring vaccination rates together with sero-epidemiologic surveys of acquired immunity. Such assessments should be used to design and refine vaccination programs for large populations of animals. The vaccination/revaccination needs of an individual patient or group of animals should be assessed by a veterinarian on a regular basis as part of a comprehensive preventative health care strategy.
- The decision to administer any particular vaccine should be based on the risk of an individual animal or herd of animals contracting the disease, and vaccination protocols may vary depending on what disease entities are prevalent in any given area. The WVA urges the applicant to follow the instructions of the summary characteristics products or label instructions. Current adverse event reporting systems need improvement in the capture, investigation, analysis and reporting of vaccine-associated adverse events. All suspected adverse events (including protection failures) should be reported to the manufacturer and appropriate government agencies within the framework of pharmacovigilance programs, to allow investigation and ensure the continued safety and efficacy of veterinary vaccines.