

Principles of Wellness



The Principles of Wellness provide best practices that pet caregivers (often also called ‘pet owners’ or ‘pet parents’) can use to promote good health and meet the important needs of their animal.

The Principles cover six essential areas for dogs and cats: Primary Care, Welfare, Dermatology, Nutrition, Parasite Control and Vaccination. Within each, caregivers will find practical steps they can implement at home to better track and maintain their animal's health and wellness. They will also find guidance on important preventative care they can consider with a veterinary professional on a regular basis. The Principles of Wellness are most valuable when used by a caregiver and veterinary professional working as a team.

Every pet is unique with their own specific needs that will always require tailored care. The Principles of Wellness provide an overview of practices that can support caregivers with the health and wellness of their pets. Caregivers should always consult with a veterinarian before creating a wellness plan for their animal or to discuss potential conditions. This veterinary expertise is essential for pets to live a long, healthy life. More resources can be found on the last page or at the World Small Animal Veterinary Association website, [WSAVA.org](https://www.wsaava.org).

Introduction

For pets and people alike, prevention is better than cure and maintenance is better than repair. The Principles of Wellness are intended to offer a unified, comprehensive strategy for pet caregivers and veterinarians to prevent pets from falling ill while managing any changes in health as early and as effectively as possible. Following these Principles will help pets to live long and healthy lives by:

Preventing common diseases

Veterinary tools of prevention are more effective than ever. Routine vaccines, and preventative treatments for fleas, ticks and worms have all helped contribute to longer life expectancy for pets around the world. For example, life expectancy among dog breeds in the US increased by almost four years and by more than five years for cats between 1981 and 2019.¹

Life expectancy for cats in the US increased by **more than five years** between 1981 and 2019



Detecting health changes as early as possible

Most animals are hardwired to disguise discomfort, making it even harder for pet caregivers to spot signs of illness. But the combination of real-time monitoring and responsible ownership, together with veterinary expertise, can minimise many aspects of ill-health and its impact on quality of life. For instance, when chronic kidney disease is detected early before symptoms are apparent, the disease can be managed and a dog or cat can live many years. However, an advanced case can be challenging and possibly fatal.



Real-time monitoring, responsible ownership, and veterinary expertise, can minimise many aspects of ill-health



One in five

dogs tested in dog parks were positive for intestinal parasites

Monitoring for invisible illnesses

Regular check-ups and screenings allow veterinarians to check for health issues that might not be obvious, such as parasitic illnesses, which are a common yet unseen risk. For example, an estimated 1 million dogs in the U.S. were heartworm positive in 2019, a serious parasite that can be fatal for dogs.² In a study of dog parks, around one in five tested dogs were positive for intestinal parasites.³



Chronic kidney disease can affect as many as **30-40%** of cats over 10 years old

Intervening as early as possible

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is a common feline disease that can affect cats at all ages, but more commonly in older animals with as many as 30-40% of cats over 10 years old can be affected. Early detection and continued evaluation can slow progression and improve an animal's quality of life.⁴ Studies have found that seemingly healthy animals may have undetected issues that are only found after screening tests are done, with the chances of a significant finding increasing with older animals and certain breeds.^{5,6,7,8}

Managing pet health together

The foundation of good pet health is a strong relationship between a caregiver and their veterinarian. Together, they can understand a pet's health needs and work to prevent problems before they occur. Everyone can be on the same page to uphold pet wellness.

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Principles in Action

Below are some of the key steps across the Principles of Wellness that pet caregiver can consider when visiting the veterinary clinic or at home to promote good health. All are general guidelines and caregivers should discuss with their veterinarian how to tailor them to their pet.

At the Veterinary Clinic

	Stage of Life ⁹			
Procedure	Puppy / Kitten	Adult	Senior	Other Considerations
Veterinarian Visit (Often called a 'Check-up' or 'Wellness visit')	At least once a year for all pets, and more frequently in very young, senior, pregnant or pets with chronic disease. Consult with your veterinarian for an ideal schedule.			Animals that appear sick or showing unexpected behaviors (e.g. loss of appetite, lack of energy, etc) should see a veterinarian as soon as possible. Do not wait until your annual appointment.
Vaccination	Core vaccines beginning in first 6–8 weeks of life	Boosters as-needed	Boosters as-needed	Non-core vaccines should be administered based on a pet's risk factors.
Nutrition	Discuss current nutrition with a veterinary professional at each visit. Consider if any changes to the diet, amount of calories or feeding strategy are needed, particularly when your pet enters a new stage of life or develops a health condition.			Consult with a veterinarian before any major diet changes, particularly if considering non-traditional diets (raw, vegetarian, homemade, etc).
Parasite Prevention*	Begin at 2 weeks. Then regular treatment in at-risk regions	Regular preventative treatment in at-risk regions.		Animals in low-risk areas for parasites should consult with their veterinarian for an appropriate treatment schedule
Blood test	Annual heartworm and tickborne disease testing in at-risk areas.* For other conditions requiring a blood test, discuss an appropriate schedule with your veterinarian.			Potential reasons for testing include: age, new medication, prevention, illness, changes in health or behavior, etc.
Urinalysis*	Consult with a veterinarian for schedule that fits your pet's needs		Annually	Potential reasons for testing include: age, new medication, prevention, high-risk breeds, changes in behaviour, etc.
Fecal test*	2–4 times in first year	Regularly for pets at-risk of internal parasites		Animals with an internal infection may require up to 4 tests / year

* Parasite prevention, tick-borne disease testing, and heartworm testing in this document align with recommendations from Parasite Councils in the US, EU and Tropical regions. See 'Notes' section for more detail on this and other testing. Caregivers outside these regions should speak with a veterinary professional about proper parasite control.

At Home

Practice	Guidance	Other Considerations
Skin and Coat Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check regularly for fur loss, injuries, parasites or other issues. Any issues should be discussed with a veterinary professional • Regularly clean and care for coat and skin. Can include bathing (dogs only), brushing, trimming, etc. 	Routine bathing is not necessary for most cats
Diet and Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure access to fresh clean water and replace daily. • Provide a complete and balanced diet tailored to species, life stage, activity and any medical conditions. • Clean food and water bowls regularly. • Monitor your pet's physical condition and discuss unexpected weight loss / gain or signs of any health issue with a veterinarian. • Prevent overweight or obesity by balancing calorie intake and activity levels, and monitoring your pet's body condition. 	Veterinarians are a critical source of accurate information on nutrition. Caregivers should seek their advice when considering their pet's diet.
Parasite Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safely dispose of pet faeces and always wash hands afterwards. • Regularly inspect skin and fur for fleas and ticks, particularly after outdoor activities in at-risk regions. • Provide a regular parasite preventative if in an area where fleas, ticks, and/or worms are a risk for pets. • If using a preventative, follow manufacturers instructions and ensure it is administered on schedule for proper protection. • Take steps to protect yourself such as covering children's sandboxes, regular handwashing, and litter tray cleaning, etc. • Record when your pet receives a preventative to track use. 	Indoor animals can be at risk of parasite infections and appropriate steps should be taken for protection.
Welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make 'prevention' the foundation of pet care. Avoiding issues before they arise is the best way to prevent pain and suffering. • Allow regular opportunities to express typical animal behaviors such as social interaction and environmental exploration. • Ensure pets can be easily identified either through microchips or other non-painful forms of identification. • Seek veterinary care if your pet shows warning signs of potential problems such as loss of appetite, reduced mobility or activity, low energy, lameness / joint issues, or other out-of-the-ordinary behaviors. • Manage the risk of dental disease through appropriate care like regularly brushing a pet's teeth. • Provide end-of-life care in consultation with a veterinarian when required. 	If a pet is microchipped, caregivers should ensure their animals are registered in relevant local systems and update it when any details (e.g. home address) change.

Principles of Primary Care

*Primary care encompasses many of the basic veterinary practices, including the diagnosis and treatment of conditions. It requires establishing a relationship with a veterinary professional early in a pet's life – ideally in the first weeks or months – and ensuring it is maintained for the years ahead. **The goal of primary care is to provide a foundation for life-long health and wellness for a pet.***

Regular veterinary check-ups are the core of primary care. These visits help pet caregivers avoid issues like acute or chronic illness that can cause pain and suffering for their animal and are generally more costly to treat than prevent. The exact schedule of visits will depend on the animal's age, breed, medical history, and underlying risks – but all pet caregivers should strive for at least an annual visit.

The Principles of Primary Care outline many of the procedures a caregiver can expect during a veterinary clinical visit. Not every procedure will be required at every visit but discussing a schedule with a veterinary professional and adhering to recommendations can form the basis of a 'wellness plan' that sets an animal up for good health in the years ahead.

Principles

Dogs and cats should visit a veterinary professional for a 'check-up' at least once a year. These clinical examinations should be performed more frequently in very young, older, pregnant, lactating animals or in animals suffering from chronic pain or illness.

- **Clinical examinations** typically include the following baseline readings:
 - Heart and breathing examination, pulse check, pain assessment, body temperature, nutrition assessment and a mouth examination for dental health.
 - A record of the animal's body weight (BW), body condition score (BCS) and muscle condition score (MCS)
 - *Feline specific:* A blood pressure measurement should ideally be recorded, especially in patients over 10 years of age
- **Clinical examinations** should also consider the testing outlined below.

Pets should receive a 'risk assessment' to help their caregiver decide on the right forms of preventative care throughout an animal's life. This can include evaluating an animal's individual habits, typical activities, level of interaction with other animals, etc. as well as environmental factors such as the local geography and climate. Veterinary professionals should also discuss a caregiver's personal risk tolerance, which can inform decisions such as frequency of diagnostic screening, and value of prevention vs treatment. Altogether, this risk assessment information can provide the basis of a long-term wellness plan for an individual pet.

Blood and urine tests can be considered for animals during a check-up visit. Blood tests will often include tests like a complete blood count (CBC) and biochemistry profile, while urinalysis can help identify conditions like liver or kidney disease. Tests can be done to diagnose a specific condition or preventatively to confirm health status and screen for potential diseases. Caregivers should expect their animal will receive multiple blood and/or urine tests during their pet's lifetime with the frequency generally increasing with age. For instance, an animal may receive 1–2 tests during adult years for various reasons (see below), rising to annually in senior years as risk of chronic illness grows. The exact schedule will vary by animal and should be determined in consultation with their veterinarian. Reasons caregivers and veterinarians may choose to conduct these tests include:

- **Age:** Senior pets should receive annual blood and urine tests for early disease detection. Veterinarians may conduct a blood test in the first year of life for puppies. Some normal, adult patients may also receive testing to establish baseline readings.
- **Prevention:** Veterinarians may recommend annual preventative ‘wellness’ testing for their pet. This type of testing is done to screen for potential issues such as kidney disease before a pet shows signs of a clinical issue and support early intervention.
- **Behavior Change:** Animals showing sudden signs of abnormal behavior such as decreased appetite, lack of energy, or a change in their normal behavior may be showing signs of illness. A blood and/or urine test may be conducted to identify potential issues.
- **Medicine and Procedures:** Pets starting a new medication may receive a blood test prior to introduction so veterinarians can track the effects of the medicine. Animals scheduled for major surgery or anesthesia may also receive blood testing in advance.
- **High-Risk:** Breeds at high-risk for certain types of disease (e.g. kidney, liver, etc) may receive more frequent blood and urine tests to support early detection.

Fecal testing can be considered during a check-up visit to screen for internal parasites. Animals in their first year of life will typically need 2–4 tests. Afterwards, ‘Parasite Councils’ in the United States, European Union and the Tropics recommend regular testing to ensure animals remain parasite-free¹⁰. While fecal tests can detect parasite infestations, using parasite preventatives in at-risk areas is the most important defense for pets (see ‘Principles of Parasitology’ for more detail).

Testing for tick-borne disease and heartworm should be considered annually in at-risk regions, which are areas where harmful pet parasites are present. ‘Parasite Councils’ in the United States, European Union and the Tropics recommend regular or annual testing for pets living in these areas¹². Testing should be done alongside the use of preventatives as parasites like heartworm are dangerous and can be challenging to treat.

Viral testing should be considered for cats following adoption, prior to vaccination or when showing clinical signs. A veterinarian will advise caregivers on when testing may be needed outside of these times, particularly for cats with outdoor access that may be at higher risk¹¹.

Nutritional needs should be discussed at check-up visits. An appropriate diet, amount and feeding strategy will vary based on age, breed, medical conditions, etc., and a veterinary professional can help caregivers make decisions that best suit their individual situation. More information can be found in the Principles of Nutrition.

Parasite prevention in at-risk regions and vaccination should be performed according to the guidance provided in Principles of Parasitology and Principles of Vaccination.

Principles of Dermatology

*Dermatology encompasses the care of the skin and fur of an animal. While some dermatology practices are familiar to people, such as brushing and bathing, the needs of animals can be unique. For instance, a pet's natural behavior may mean it spends time outdoors playing in grassy areas, which means parasites like ticks are a concern. An animal's fur can also hide skin issues that would otherwise be easily observed. **The goal of dermatology is provide the care a pet needs for a healthy skin and coat.***

Principles

The coat and the skin of all pets should be checked regularly for any signs of infection, matting, fur loss, wounds, parasites or for any other abnormalities. Ideally, this examination should be performed on a regular basis (e.g. weekly) by a pet caregiver and any abnormalities examined by a veterinary professional.

The coat and skin of all pets should receive regular care and cleaning, which, depending upon the specific requirements of the individual species and the breed, can include brushing, bathing, trimming or other forms of care. Caregivers should discuss the right interval with their veterinarian as unnecessary care such as bathing too often can be harmful for an animal's coat and/or skin. Bathing is rarely necessary for cats.

Pets at risk of flea and/or tick exposure should receive regular prevention treatments that is appropriate for their species, size, and age group. See the Principles of Parasitology for more detail.

All treatment of skin or fur abnormalities should be performed with licensed veterinary products and following the advice of a suitably qualified veterinary professional.

Animals should have access to clean water and receive a complete, balanced diet that supports coat and skin health. This requires consideration of breed, age and health conditions that affect skin or coat (such as allergies). Nutritional supplements such as fish oils may be appropriate for some skin conditions as advised by your veterinarian, while avoiding specific ingredients may be required for some animals. More information can be found in the Principles of Nutrition.

Watch for any signs of increased or severe itchiness as this can be a sign of a potential issue that requires veterinary care. Severe itch is a significant welfare issue and can be painful for pets. Caregivers that suspect their pet is itching more than normal or the itch is causing pain should visit their veterinarian to have their animal evaluated.

Additional Guidance

Animal's coat and skin types can vary widely depending upon the breed. Animals with special considerations can often include:

- **Longer-haired animals:** Caregivers should pay particularly attention to the skin when doing any type of examination as issues under the coat may not be as easily visible.
- **Unique skin or coats:** Special attention should be given to animals that have very unique skins or coats based on their breed (e.g. excessive skin folds in Persian cats). These animals may require more frequent checks and care, which can be guided by a veterinary professional.
- **Animals with allergies:** The skin of animals with environmental or food-related allergies are more likely to get inflamed, which can affect their physical and mental well-being. Caregivers should take steps to reduce the risk of exposure and/or limit the impact where possible.
- **Shedding:** Some dogs may shed their coat annually, while others may have limited or no shedding (e.g. poodles). It is valuable to ask your veterinarian what to expect with your breed of dog.

Principles of Nutrition

The goal of nutrition is to provide a complete and balanced diet that supports good health, prevents illness and supports a pet's natural immune system. The nutrition needs of pets are quite different from that of a person, and this will vary further depending upon the pet's age, breed and health considerations like weight management and urinary, skin, or kidney conditions. Diets may need to be specifically chosen to meet an individual pet's needs, which change over time. Veterinary professionals play a crucial role in helping caregivers decide upon a nutrition plan that meets their pet's unique needs and help with revisions over time.

Principles:

Always provide access to clean and fresh water. This is particularly important in elderly pets or in pets with underlying illnesses, as dehydration can occur quickly. Caregivers can consider canned foods and/or adding water to dry foods to increase water intake, however this should be discussed with a veterinary professional as part of an animal's overall nutrition plan. Caregivers should also monitor water intake as over or underconsumption can be an early sign of illness.

Ensure a pet's diet is complete, balanced and suitable to their lifestyle and life stage. Veterinary professionals can help caregivers decide on a diet that best fits their animal as well as their time, lifestyle, finances, etc. Guidelines provided by veterinary authorities like the World Small Animal Veterinary Association may also help in decision-making. Caregivers should also be aware that some human foods can be toxic and cause illness for animals. Furthermore, even human foods that are safe for animals can still be a source of additional calories that contribute to obesity.

Monitor the size, body weight and health needs of a pet over time. Caregivers should watch for diet-related issues such as weight loss or gain, lack of energy, joint problems, etc. If these arise, caregivers should discuss with a veterinary professional whether any changes to their diet is needed.

Food type, amount and feeding strategy should be tailored to the ideal physical condition of a pet, considering an animal's size, ideal weight, age, lifestyle, etc. Veterinary professionals will often assess animals using tools such as WSAVA's Global Nutrition Toolkit or the American Animal Hospital Association's Nutritional Assessment Guidelines for Dogs and Cats. The amount fed should be adjusted as needed to maintain or to achieve an ideal body condition.

Regularly assess the nutritional status of a healthy animal together with a veterinarian and do this more frequently in pregnant, lactating, growing or ill pets. A pet's nutritional needs will change over the course of its life and adjustments will help promote good health at all stages of life.

Take steps to prevent obesity, beginning early in life with kittens and puppies. Obesity and weight management are best addressed with a suitable diet under the guidance of the veterinary team. Weight loss diets contain fewer calories while providing normal amounts of vitamins and minerals and are more suitable to reduce weight in a controlled fashion rather than just reducing the amount of food an animal is currently being fed. Weight management will also involve considering lifestyle, activity levels, aging, and other feeding practices (i.e. treats).

Regularly clean food and water bowls, ideally daily, to avoid the build-up of harmful bacteria.

Any gastrointestinal distress should be checked by a veterinary professional, as this can be a sign of food allergies or other significant problems. Signs of illness can include vomiting, severe diarrhoea, constipation, discoloration of faeces, or other obvious abnormalities.

Consider potential risks of any non-traditional diet such as:

- **Raw meat:** Raw meat can cause gastrointestinal or other health problems, and may result in disease being spread through faeces even if an animal shows no signs of illness, which can cause illness in the pet's caregiver or others who come in contact.
- **Vegetarian / vegan:** Vegetarian and vegan diets frequently do not meet all nutritional needs and can be harmful as a result.
- **Homemade foods:** Caregivers must take steps to ensure that any homemade diets meet the safety needs and nutritional requirements of their animal, and should contact a board-certified veterinary nutritionist (or equivalent) to advise on a suitable diet formulation.

Additional Guidance

Any change to a new diet should ideally be conducted gradually over a period of 7-10 days, so acceptance and tolerance of the diet can be monitored. This allows time for an animal's digestive tract to adapt and allows caregiver's to recognize any issues if they arise.

Benefits of a proper diet are only realized if an animal eats its food. Tips to help an animal accept their diet can include gentle heating of wet foods and adding warm water to dry pet foods. Regularly using treats such as caloric-dense human foods to coax an animal to eat should be avoided as it can lead to obesity or other issues.

Principles of Parasite Control

*Parasites are a common risk to pets and people and can cause a range of ailments. Internal parasites such as heartworm can be life-threatening, while external parasites such as fleas and ticks can transmit harmful, sometimes deadly, disease. Furthermore, some parasites and the diseases they carry can harm both people and pets, therefore preventing parasites from affecting an animal in the first place can provide protection to the wider household. **The goal of parasite control is to help ensure pets are free from harmful parasites, while both the people and animals around them are protected.***

Controlling parasites requires preventative action tailored to an animal's specific situation. It requires considering an animal's geographic location and lifestyle, as well as their caregiver's level of risk tolerance. Even when animals live indoors, the risk of parasites is never zero.

The Principles of Parasitology provide guidance on both the steps caregivers can take to protect their pets while at home or during a clinical visit, alongside factors that can be considered when deciding on the right forms of parasite control. Wherever possible, these align with the recommendations of 'Parasite Councils' such as the 'European Scientific Counsel Companion Animal Parasites' (ESCCAP) in the EU and the Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC) in the USA, which also provide useful guidance to pet caretakers in their specific region.

Principles:

Parasite control is an integral part of feline and canine preventative care. External parasites like fleas and ticks and internal parasites like worms can pose a serious risk to pet health. Caregivers should closely consider the risk factors for their animals and steps required for control in consultation with a local veterinary professional.

Prevention of parasites should be a lifelong consideration. Animals in at-risk areas or traveling to regions where parasites are present can benefit from preventative measures and medicines. Caregivers should discuss the right approach with a veterinary professional. Common parasites and considerations include:

- **Fleas:** Flea infestations are a year-round-risk for many pets and exposure is difficult to avoid. Caregivers should be aware that if a preventative is not used and an infestation is established, fleas can take at least 3 months to treat on the animal and in the surrounding household.
- **Ticks:** Animals in at-risk areas where ticks are prevalent can benefit from regular or continuous tick treatments. Caregivers should be aware that ticks can also transmit disease to people and household infestations of some ticks (e.g. brown dog ticks) can take several months to control.
- **Heartworm:** Pets may not demonstrate clinical signs of a heartworm infection until it is advanced and can be fatal. Caregivers in at-risk areas should strongly consider preventative and regular testing.
- **Leishmania:** Sand flies can transmit Leishmania, a deadly parasitic disease for people and animals. Dogs in at-risk areas should be treated with a preventative to protect against sand fly bites and reduce the risk of infection.

Parasite prevention should begin early in life – with treatments beginning in the first weeks of life for kittens and puppies and then continued with appropriate, regular treatments for life. The specific treatment interval will depend upon the region and risk. Parasite Councils in US and EU recommend continuous treatment (i.e. monthly or annual treatments) with an annual diagnostic screening in areas where parasites like heartworm are endemic. Caregivers should consult with their veterinarian for the most appropriate guidelines.

Caregivers should have a parasite control strategy before providing outdoor access to their pet in at-risk areas. While indoor animals may also need a level of control, outdoor animals are particularly at risk when living in areas where parasites like fleas and ticks are present. Caregivers should speak with their veterinarian about parasite preventatives that can protect their animals. More information can be found below.

The skin and coat of a pet should be regularly inspected for parasites like fleas and ticks. Caregivers should check animals for ticks following outdoor walks in at-risk regions, especially after walking in areas of tall grass, brush and/or wooded areas. If found, parasites should be promptly treated by a veterinary professional and any recommended follow-up testing for parasitic disease should be considered.

Pets should receive parasite treatment if living in an ‘at-risk’ area where fleas, ticks and/or worms are widely present. For instance, the U.S. Companion Animal Parasite Council recommends year-round treatment due to the presence of certain parasites like heartworm in all states. Caregivers should also understand that indoor animals remain at risk of parasites. Caregivers should speak with their veterinarian to understand the risk factors in their area and develop an appropriate approach for parasite control.

Parasite testing should be considered at check-up visits. This includes annual or regular testing for internal parasites, tick-borne disease and heartworm, as recommended by Parasite Councils in the US, EU and Tropics. These tests will be done via blood or fecal testing. See ‘Principles of Primary Care’ for more detail.

Indoor animals remain at risk of parasite infections and an appropriate prevention plan should be established with a veterinarian that accounts for the remaining risk of exposure.

Pet faeces should be safely disposed to avoid the risk of potential infection of other animals or humans in the case of zoonotic diseases. Caregivers should always wash their hands after disposal.

Caregivers should implement hygiene measures to protect themselves and others against parasites and parasitic disease that can be transmitted to people. This includes covering sand boxes on children's playground when not in use, regular handwashing, regular cleaning of litter trays, avoiding raw meat diets, proper pet waste disposal, etc. Veterinary professionals can advise on other measures appropriate for a caregiver's situation.

Lyme Disease vaccination can be considered in dogs living in or near areas where an infection with *Borrelia burgdorferi* is possible. However, caregivers should be made aware that effective tick prevention is still necessary even with vaccination.

Additional Guidance:

Caregivers should closely follow the instructions on any parasite control product. Many parasiticides are administered at home by a caregiver. Each comes with instructions on proper administration that caregivers must follow to protect themselves, the animal and environment.

Principles of Vaccination

Vaccination is one of the most common and foundational forms of preventative care. Vaccines protect animals against many serious illnesses and widespread use can even help eliminate some diseases by providing herd immunity. Furthermore, with some 'zoonotic' diseases like rabies affecting both pets and people, vaccination of pets can safeguard caregivers and the public against these illnesses. **The goal of vaccination is to ensure pets are protected against diseases that can lead to serious harm, including death.**

Principles:

All dogs and cats need to be vaccinated to protect the animal, promote herd immunity and, in some cases, protect human health. Some vaccines prevent diseases like rabies which can be transmitted from animals to people and pose a significant public health risk. Even indoor animals are at risk of diseases that can be prevented through vaccination.

Core vaccines are vaccines that should be administered to all dogs and cats based on the region in which they live or travel to. Core vaccines include:

- **Dogs:** Canine Distemper Virus (CDV), Canine Adenovirus type 1 (CAV), Canine Parvovirus type 2 (CPV), Rabies (in countries where this disease is still present, if visiting these countries or when there is a legal requirement) and Leptospirosis (where the disease is present in dogs).
- **Cats:** Feline Panleukopenia Virus (FPV), Feline Calicivirus (FCV), Feline Herpesvirus 1 (FHV -1), rabies (in countries where this disease is still present or if visiting the country) and Feline Leukaemia virus (FeLV) (for young cats, < 1 year of age, and for adult cats with outdoor access or that live with other cats that have outdoor access, where FeLV is present).

Non-core vaccines should be administered based on an individual animal's risk factor (e.g. geography, environment and lifestyle). Decisions on core vaccines should be made in consultation with a veterinary professional. Non-core vaccines include:

- **Dogs:** *Bordetella bronchiseptica* (Kennel cough), Canine Parainfluenza Virus (CPiV) (Kennel cough), Canine Influenza Virus (CIV) (Kennel cough), *Leishmania infantum*, *Borrelia burgdorferi* (Lyme borreliosis; only for dogs with a known high risk of exposure) and Canine Herpesvirus-1 (only for female dogs during pregnancy).
- **Cats:** *Chlamydia felis*, *Bordetella bronchiseptica* and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV).

Animals should receive an initial vaccination and, if applicable, booster vaccinations to maintain protection. Many vaccines provide robust protection, but typically only for a certain period of time. Therefore, booster vaccinations ensure continued protection over time. Veterinary professionals can advise caregivers on the correct frequency and timing for vaccinations, which is guided by WSAVA Vaccination Guidelines for Cats and Dogs.¹²

Additional Guidance:

Adverse reactions to vaccinations are uncommon and usually of no serious concern but should be reported to a veterinary professional who had administered the vaccine and the manufacturer.

Alternatives to vaccinations such as homeopathic remedies do not provide protection against the above-mentioned diseases and should not be used.

Principles of Welfare

*Pets rely upon their caregivers to provide them with an environment where they have the best opportunity to live a long, healthy and fulfilling life. This means ensuring their welfare needs are met, including thirst, hunger and nutrition, opportunities to express normal behaviors, avoiding fear and distress, and preventing pain, injury and disease wherever possible. **The goal of welfare is to meet the basic needs of a pet and provide them the opportunity to thrive throughout its life.** The Principles of Wellness offer core considerations to help caregivers safeguard their pet's welfare and strengthen the human-animal bond.*

Principles:

Pets must be treated with respect and dignity throughout their lives. Pet caregivers are responsible for meeting the basic welfare needs of their animal. This ranges from providing physical exercise to a nutritious diet and proper veterinary care. Providing opportunities to express natural behaviors (e.g. sniffing, playing, etc) and avoiding distress will contribute to a positive mental state and support overall health. It is important for caregivers to establish a relationship with a qualified veterinary professional and discuss how they can provide the right care for their animal.

Pets must live in an environment that provides protection and comfort. This includes a quiet resting place as well as regular opportunities for toileting, movement, hiding, exercise and mental stimulation in hygienic surroundings. This will promote both physical health and a positive mental state.

Pets must be offered opportunities to express typical animal behaviors, such as toileting, playing, social interaction with humans and/or other animals, exploring its environment, and rewarding experiences. Confining animals to a small cage or chaining them in a small area will limit their ability to express these types of behaviors and will affect their physical and mental well-being.

Preventative care should be the foundation of a pet's welfare. The best protection against ill health is prevention, which means steps such as vaccination, protection against parasites and good nutrition can all provide important safeguards for an animal. This will ultimately avoid pain, injury and distress during their lifetime. An established relationship with a veterinary professional also ensures good advice and an opportunity for treatment if an illness occurs.

Dogs and cats should be easily identifiable through microchips or other nonpainful means of identification whenever possible. Caregivers should register microchipped animals in relevant recording systems when available in their country and update them when details (e.g. home address) change.

Pain, injury and disease needs to be addressed promptly through proper treatment and/or ongoing management to alleviate any physical or mental stress on the animal. Veterinary professionals should always be consulted if a caregiver is unsure how or unable to address an issue.

Animals should be monitored for any signs of chronic diseases like osteoarthritis and kidney disease. When these long-term diseases are diagnosed early, caregivers and veterinarians can better treat the condition and manage any accompanying distress. Late interventions may be less effective or more burdensome on the animal. Veterinary professionals can advise caregivers if their animal is at-risk and any signs to watch for.

Caregivers should take steps to prevent dental disease in their pets. It is one of the most common sources of pain that can be delayed or avoided through regular care and suitable diet. Veterinary professionals can provide treatment and pain relief if a problem is identified.

Only licensed veterinary medications should be used when available and appropriate. Any other medication should only be used when allowed as an exception within the national legal statutes and strictly under the guidance of a veterinary professional.

Caregivers should take notice of any negative physical or behavioral signs of anxiety, frustration, fear, pain, distress, or ill-health in their pet. Preventative action needs to be taken to avoid triggers generating signs of negative emotional and physical states. Caregivers should seek veterinary advice if they see any concerning signs.

Notes

Stages of Life

The Principles of Wellness aligns with existing 'Life Stage' guidelines developed by the American Animal Hospital Association and American Association of Feline Practitioners, except that 'Young' and 'Mature' adult are treated simply as the 'Adult' stage in the Principles of Wellness.

	Puppy / Kitten	Young Adult	Mature Adult	Senior
Feline	Birth to 1 year	1–6 years	7–10 years	10+
Canine	Birth to cessation of rapid growth (6–9 mo, varying with breed and size)	Cessation of rapid growth to completion of physical and social maturation, which occurs in most dogs by 3 to 4 yr of age	Completion of physical and social maturation until the last 25% of estimated lifespan (breed and size dependent)	The last 25% of estimated lifespan through end of life

Parasite and Vector-Borne Disease Testing

Below are more complete details from the global Parasite Councils regarding testing for worms, other internal parasites and vector-borne diseases.

United States Companion Animal Parasite Council ¹³	<p>Vector-Borne Disease: "Test annually for tick-transmitted pathogens, especially in regions where pathogens are endemic or emerging"</p> <p>Worm Control: "Conduct annual heartworm testing in dogs; test cats prior to placing on heartworm preventive and thereafter as indicated."</p> <p>Other Internal Parasites: "Conduct microscopic fecal examinations by centrifugation at least four times during the first year of life, and at least two times per year in adults, depending on patient health and lifestyle factors."</p>
European Union European Scientific Counsel Companion Animal Parasites ¹⁴	<p>Vector-Borne Disease: "Control of [zoonotic] infections through regular diagnostic testing in endemic areas"</p> <p>Worm Control: "Responsible ownership of cats and dogs includes regular health controls with faecal diagnostics and deworming accompanied by regular testing for efficacy"</p>
Tropical Regions Tropical Council for Companion Animal Parasites ¹⁵	<p>Vector-Borne Disease & Other Internal Parasites: "Dogs should be tested for gastrointestinal parasites at least once every 3 months to monitor the efficacy of parasite control regimes and owner compliance"</p> <p>Worm Control: "Dogs should be tested for heartworm on an annual basis regardless of prophylaxis use to monitor product efficacy and owner compliance"</p>

Retroviral Testing

Below are more complete details on retroviral testing from leading expert organisations.

American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP)¹⁶	"Annual testing of breeding cats is ideal, but testing any new cats before being introduced to an FIV-free colony is vital."
International Cat Care¹⁷	"The retrovirus status of every cat at risk of infection should be known. Cats should be tested as soon as possible after they are acquired, following exposure to an infected cat or a cat of unknown infection status, prior to vaccination against FeLV or FIV, and whenever clinical illness occurs."

Urinalysis

While urine testing can provide value at all ages, it is an important consideration for older animals. Veterinary groups and some studies have found that urinalysis in senior pets can identify underlying issues in seemingly health animals

American Animal Hospital Association	2023 AAHA Senior Care Guidelines for Dogs and Cats recommend urinalysis every 6-12 months
Studies	<p>Select peer-reviewed literature has found evidence of abnormalities in seemingly healthy senior dogs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marynissen, S J J et al. "Proteinuria in Apparently Healthy Elderly Dogs: Persistency and Comparison Between Free Catch and Cystocentesis Urine." Journal of veterinary internal medicine vol. 31,1 (2017): 93-101. doi:10.1111/jvim.14635 • Willems, A et al. "Results of Screening of Apparently Healthy Senior and Geriatric Dogs." Journal of veterinary internal medicine vol. 31,1 (2017): 81-92. doi:10.1111/jvim.14587
Other research	Private diagnostics data also indicates that urinalysis detects issues in a notable proportion of seemingly healthy senior animals. IDEXX states analyses of testing data shows a higher likelihood of abnormalities in senior animals. See more at the ' IDEXX Veterinary Preventive Care Resource Center '

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Endnotes

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- 2 <https://www.avma.org/javma-news/2020-08-01/heartworm-prevalent-south-expanding-other-hot-spots#:~:text=Using%20the%20survey%20results%20and,of%20dogs%2C%20AHS%20data%20show>.
- 3 Drake, J., Sweet, S., Baxendale, K. et al. Detection of Giardia and helminths in Western Europe at local K9 (canine) sites (DOGWALKS Study). *Parasites Vectors* 15, 311 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13071-022-05440-2>
- 4 ISFM Consensus Guidelines on the Diagnosis and Management of Feline Chronic Kidney Disease. *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* (2016) 18, 219–239
- 5 Paepe D, Verjans G, Duchateau L, Piron K, Ghys L, Daminet S. Routine health screening: findings in apparently healthy middle-aged and old cats. *J Feline Med Surg*. 2013 Jan;15(1):8-19. doi: 10.1177/1098612X12464628. PMID: 23254237.
- 6 Dell'Osa D, Jaensch S. Prevalence of clinicopathological changes in healthy middle-aged dogs and cats presenting to veterinary practices for routine procedures. *Aust Vet J*. 2016 Sep;94(9):317-23. doi: 10.1111/avj.12481. PMID: 27569834.
- 7 Willems A, Paepe D, Marynissen S, Smets P, Van de Maele I, Picavet P, Duchateau L, Daminet S. Results of Screening of Apparently Healthy Senior and Geriatric Dogs. *J Vet Intern Med*. 2017 Jan;31(1):81-92. doi: 10.1111/jvim.14587. Epub 2016 Oct 17. PMID: 27747924; PMCID: PMC5259637.
- 8 Paepe D, Saunders JH, Bavegams V, Paes G, Peelman LJ, Makay C, Daminet S. Screening of ragdoll cats for kidney disease: a retrospective evaluation. *J Small Anim Pract*. 2012 Oct;53(10):572-7. doi: 10.1111/j.1748-5827.2012.01254.x. Epub 2012 Aug 2. PMID: 22860918.
- 9 See 'Notes' section for stage of life definitions
- 10 More information on Parasite Council recommendations can be found in the 'Notes' section at the end of this document.
- 11 More guidance from expert groups on viral testing for cats can be found in the Notes section.
- 12 Squires RA, Crawford C, Marcondes M, Whitley N. 2024 guidelines for the vaccination of dogs and cats - compiled by the Vaccination Guidelines Group (VGG) of the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA). *J Small Anim Pract*. 2024 May;65(5):277-316. doi: 10.1111/jsap.13718. Epub 2024 Apr 3. PMID: 38568777.
- 13 <https://capcvet.org/guidelines/general-guidelines/>
- 14 https://www.esccap.org/uploads/docs/okkqb4dw_1058_ESCCAP_MG5_English_v12.pdf
- 15 https://www.troccap.com/2017press/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/TroCCAP_Canine_Endo_Guidelines_English_Ver2.pdf
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