

Health Care Focus

Preventative Care for Dogs

Specially prepared for:



Pebble Creek • Temple Terrace • North Bay • All Creatures • Cheval • Tampa Palms • Caladesi

Overall, your pet appears to be in good general health based on the examination. Please refer to the examination and health care report card provided by your veterinarian for details on any abnormal findings. Based on the examination and consultation, the following areas have been identified by your veterinarian as the focus of your pet's health care.

Preventative Care

Preventive care is the health care provided to prevent disease and help keep your pet healthy. It's crucial to practice appropriate preventive care measures tailored to your pet's breed, age, and lifestyle to best ensure their well-being. This care can help extend your pet's lifespan, improve their quality of life, and reduce veterinary costs over time by preventing potentially high expenses associated with diagnosing and treating illnesses.

Vaccines, sometimes referred to as "shots", are necessary to prevent the diseases they are named for. They provide your pet with immunity and work in two ways:

1. If your pet is exposed to the disease, they will likely not contract it because their immune system is able to completely eliminate the pathogen.
2. If your pet does contract the disease, the resulting clinical signs and illness are significantly milder than they would be without vaccination, as the immune system is better equipped to manage it. In these cases, your pet may exhibit only mild symptoms or none that require veterinary care.



Most vaccines require a booster 3 to 6 weeks after the initial dose because the immunity provided by the first vaccine is short-lived without follow-up. In puppies, the immune system is not yet fully developed, so one dose is not enough to provide complete protection. For this reason, some vaccines must be administered every 3 weeks starting at 6 weeks of age and continuing until the puppy is 4 months old. If your pet is a puppy, your veterinarian will provide a personalized vaccine schedule.

The following sections highlight recommended care that may be necessary for your pet.

General Care

All dogs require the following health care measures to support optimal health:

1. Rabies Vaccine

Every dog needs this vaccine—initially given around 4 months of age, then annually during the first vaccination period, and every three years thereafter. It protects against a deadly virus that causes severe neurological disease and can be transmitted to people and other animals through bites.

Rabies is a fatal disease with no available treatment once contracted. Vaccination against rabies is required by law for all dogs. If your dog bites another animal or person—or if there is a claim that your dog has bitten—failing to vaccinate can result in serious penalties. These may include mandatory quarantine, relinquishment, or even euthanasia of your pet. Additionally, not registering and certifying your dog's rabies vaccination with the county can lead to significant financial fines.

Some people may believe that rabies no longer exists or is unlikely to affect their pet. Thanks to widespread vaccination efforts, the virus has greatly declined in the animal population. However, rabies can still be contracted from unvaccinated pets and wildlife, such as raccoons, opossums, bats, and feral cats.

In the past 20 years in Florida alone, 305 cats, 58 dogs, and 2,585 raccoons have tested positive for rabies, along with one human fatality. Over 2,000 people have also required treatment after possible exposure to rabies through animal encounters. (Source: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/uw282>)

2. Distemper, Adenovirus, Parvovirus, Parainfluenza (DA2PP) vaccine

These viruses cause life-threatening symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea, pneumonia, and neurological signs. Unfortunately, there is no cure for these diseases. Some pets may survive with supportive care until the virus runs its course, but this care often requires hospitalization and can be costly—ranging from \$1,000 to \$3,000 or more. Sadly, some pets do not recover and may succumb to these illnesses.

Distemper and adenoviruses spread through the respiratory tract via sneezing, coughing, and other secretions. Parvovirus is a highly common infection among unvaccinated or incompletely vaccinated puppies and dogs, especially prevalent in this region. It spreads through contact with fecal material and causes severe vomiting, bloody diarrhea, and rapid dehydration.

Your pet does not need direct contact with other dogs to contract these viruses. The viruses can survive for extended periods as microscopic particles in the environment—including dirt, soil, grass, and various surfaces. Even pets that never go outside can bring the virus into the home on clothing or shoes after contact with the environment or other animals.

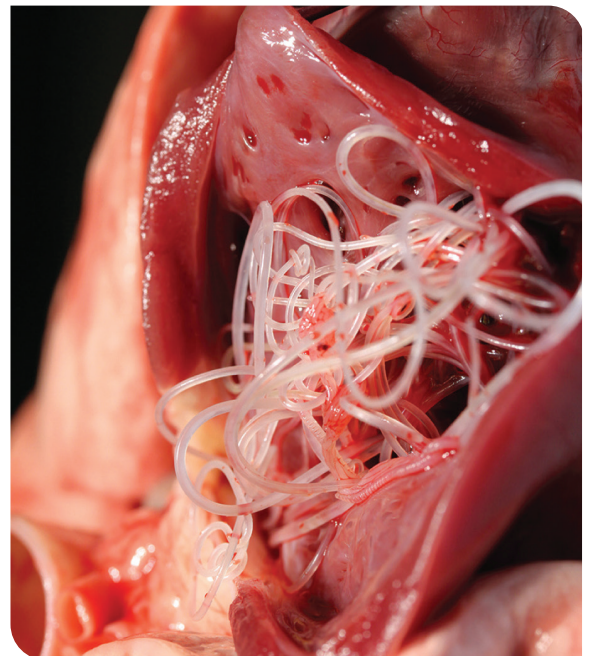
These vaccines are available as a combination vaccine, protecting against multiple viruses in one dose. Vaccination should begin around 6 weeks of age, with boosters given every 3 weeks until the puppy is 4 months old. After that, dogs need a booster one year later, followed by boosters every three years for life.

3. Leptospirosis

Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease commonly found in wildlife urine and can survive in the environment, especially in water sources like ponds, lakes, rivers, streams, standing water, and soil. Dogs can become infected through contact with these contaminated areas. If contracted, Leptospirosis can cause severe and rapid kidney and liver failure, which can be life-threatening. Importantly, Leptospirosis is zoonotic, meaning it can spread from pets to humans. If your dog becomes infected, household members—particularly children and immunocompromised individuals—are at increased risk of exposure. The University of Florida has reported a rising number of cases in recent years, highlighting the importance of prevention. Vaccination is a key preventative measure to protect your dog and your family from this serious disease.

4. Heartworm Disease Testing and Prevention

Heartworm disease is a serious, potentially life-threatening condition transmitted by mosquitoes. It only takes one bite from an infected mosquito to pass the disease to your pet. After transmission, heartworm larvae enter the bloodstream through the mosquito bite and migrate to the blood vessels of the heart, where they mature into adult worms. Adult heartworms reproduce and release microfilariae—essentially baby heartworms—into the bloodstream. As the adult worms grow, they can clog blood vessels, leading to heart and lung failure. They may also block vessels supplying the liver, resulting in liver failure. The most common symptom of heartworm disease is coughing, although coughing alone is not a definitive sign of the disease. Some pets may show no symptoms but can still suffer sudden death from the infection. A blood test is used to screen for heartworm disease and should be done every 6 months. Testing remains important even if your pet is on a monthly heartworm preventative because no preventative is 100% effective.



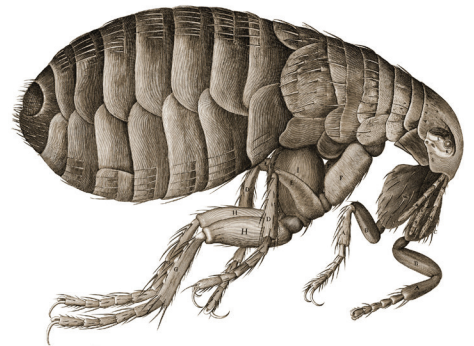
Missing a dose—even by just one day—can leave your pet vulnerable to infection, and keeping up with strict monthly dosing can be challenging. Regular testing is crucial because early diagnosis—before clinical signs appear—helps minimize organ damage and reduces risks related to both the disease and its treatment. Additionally, after infection, it takes about 6 months for heartworms to show up on tests. There are two types

of blood tests for heartworms: the antigen test, which detects adult heartworms, and the microfilaria test, which detects the presence of baby heartworms (microfilariae). Testing and prevention are important even if your pet spends little to no time outdoors, as mosquitoes often find their way inside homes. While managing your pet's environment by eliminating standing water can help reduce mosquito populations, it's impossible to completely prevent mosquito exposure. Treatment for heartworm disease is available but can be costly, typically ranging from \$1,500 to \$2,000. Costs may be higher if additional treatments are necessary due to severe infection. Treatment also carries risks, as the dying heartworms can cause serious side effects. For these reasons and many others, prevention is absolutely essential!

Heartworm preventatives come in several forms. Oral options—given by mouth—include Simparica Trio and Sentinel. Topical preventatives, applied to the skin, and injectable forms are also available. Some preventatives provide additional protection against fleas and certain intestinal parasites; examples include Simparica Trio and Sentinel (oral) and Revolution (topical). Most heartworm preventatives are given every 30 days, while the injectable option, called ProHeart, is administered every 6 to 12 months.

5. Flea Prevention

Fleas are a year-round threat in Florida. Even if you don't see fleas on your dog, it doesn't mean they aren't present. Some dogs are allergic to flea bites and can have severe skin reactions from just one bite. Fleas are experts at hiding, and by the time you spot one on your pet, there are likely millions of flea eggs already laid in your home, waiting to hatch. Fleas can survive inside protective cocoons in the environment for a year or longer, and nothing kills them while they're in this stage. This makes it very challenging to eliminate fleas once they've infested your home.



Even if your pet spends little to no time outdoors, they are still at risk for fleas. Fleas seek out warm-blooded animals and quickly target pets. They can easily enter your home through cracks under doors or hitch a ride on your shoes, socks, or pants. Since fleas prefer animals over people, you might not even notice them as they feed on your pet.

Fleas don't just live in carpets—they also hide in cracks on tile or wood floors and in the folds and creases of furniture like sofas and beds. Treating a flea infestation often requires multiple treatments from exterminators as well as thorough home treatments. Some chemicals used in environmental flea control may carry risks to both humans and pets. Prevention is essential!

Prescription-strength preventatives, available through your veterinarian, are the most effective. Most over-the-counter products are not strong enough to reliably kill and prevent fleas, and some can cause skin irritation. Flea baths and certain flea collars are often ineffective and may also irritate your pet's skin. Recommended preventatives include combination flea and heartworm medications like Simparica Trio and Sentinel, as well as Bravecto (oral) and Vectra (topical).

6. Fecal Parasite Testing

This test should be performed every 6 months to screen for gastrointestinal parasites. Parasites are rarely seen directly in the feces because they live inside the intestinal tract and pass microscopic eggs into the stool. These eggs can survive in the environment—including dirt, soil, grass, and other surfaces—for extended periods.

Common intestinal parasites include roundworms, hookworms, tapeworms, whipworms, coccidia, and giardia. While most heartworm preventatives also protect against one or more of these parasites, some parasites have no available prevention, making routine testing essential.

Even pets that spend most or all of their time indoors can be exposed to parasites, as microscopic eggs can be brought into your home on shoes or clothing. These parasites can cause symptoms like diarrhea, vomiting, malnutrition, and weight loss. Many can also be transmitted to people, especially children and individuals with weakened immune systems. Parasites can spread quickly between pets in the household and are often difficult to eliminate from the environment. For this reason, early detection through regular testing and prevention is crucial!

7. Oral Care

Dental disease is one of the most common health problems in pets because they cannot maintain their oral hygiene like we do. It begins with bacteria in the mouth that produce enzymes causing inflammation of the gums (gingivitis). If left untreated, this inflammation can damage the periodontal ligaments that support the teeth, leading to loose teeth and tooth decay. Severe dental disease can even result in fractured teeth. These harmful bacteria can also cause tooth root abscesses and infections. Worse yet, they can enter the bloodstream and spread to other organs, potentially causing serious infections in the heart valves, kidneys, and liver.



Periodontal disease is often very painful, but many pets hide this pain. Instead of showing obvious discomfort, they may compensate by chewing on one side of their mouth or may avoid chewing altogether.

The best way to care for your pet's teeth at home is through daily tooth brushing using a dog-formulated enzymatic toothpaste—never use human toothpaste, as it can be harmful to pets. In addition to brushing, dental chews, oral rinses and water additives (such as those available at <https://www.healthymouth.com/>) can support oral health. Some specially formulated dental diets are also designed to help reduce plaque and tartar buildup.

While these at home measures are helpful, they work best when combined with routine professional dental cleanings and veterinary evaluations.

8. Nutrition and Weight Control

Obesity is the most common disease affecting both dogs and cats. Maintaining your pet at a healthy weight is essential in preventing serious conditions such as arthritis, diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancer.

Your veterinarian can help develop a customized dietary plan based on your pet's age, breed, lifestyle, and medical needs. Feeding a **high-quality, balanced diet** with essential nutrients—appropriate for your pet's life stage—is key to achieving and maintaining optimal health.



Portion control is crucial. Overfeeding, frequent treats, and table scraps can quickly lead to weight gain. Minimizing or eliminating treats and avoiding human foods helps support long-term health and wellness.

9. Microchipping

A microchip is a small electronic chip, about the size of a grain of rice, that is inserted under the skin between your pet's shoulder blades using a needle. This simple and quick procedure provides **permanent identification** for your pet.

If your pet is ever lost or stolen, a microchip greatly increases the chances of being reunited. When scanned by a veterinary clinic or animal shelter, the chip provides your contact information—ensuring you can be reached quickly and safely.

10. Pet Health Insurance

Your pet deserves the highest quality of care, and **pet insurance** helps make that care more affordable—especially in times of unexpected illness or injury. Our hospital recommends **Trupanion** as a trusted insurance provider, but it's important to explore your options to find the best fit for your pet and budget.

Recommended Plan:

- **Trupanion**

Covers **90% of costs** related to illness and injury after the deductible, with **no payout limits** per year, per condition, or per pet. Trupanion also offers **direct pay** to participating veterinary hospitals, meaning you only pay your portion at the time of service instead of waiting weeks for reimbursement.

Important Considerations When Choosing a Plan:

- **Coverage limits:**
Some plans have limits on how much they'll reimburse per year, per incident, or per pet. **Trupanion does not have any caps** on payout amounts.
- **Reimbursement process:**
Most insurance companies require you to pay the full invoice up front and wait 2–4 weeks for reimbursement. **Trupanion's direct pay option** (with pre-approval) allows them to pay your vet directly at participating clinics.
- **Types of coverage:**
Trupanion focuses on illness and injury coverage. While it does not cover routine preventative care, it excels at supporting pet owners through unexpected health issues with comprehensive coverage and high reimbursement rates.
- **Pre-existing conditions:**
All insurance providers **exclude pre-existing conditions**, so the best time to enroll is **before** any signs of illness occur. Still, even pets with previous health issues may benefit from insurance for unrelated future problems.
- **Wellness plans vs. insurance:**
We also offer **in-house wellness plans** that cover routine care such as vaccines and testing. These plans are not the same as insurance and can only be used at our hospital. Unlike wellness plans, **Trupanion insurance can be used at any licensed veterinary hospital** in the United States and some other countries.

Helpful Resource:

To compare plans and read real reviews, visit: www.petinsurancereview.com

This unbiased website can help you make an informed decision that fits your pet's needs and your financial comfort.

Personalized Care and Lifestyle Vaccines

1. Canine Influenza (CIV) Vaccine

The Canine Influenza (CIV) vaccine is required by most grooming and boarding facilities to help prevent the spread of this highly contagious virus and to provide a healthier, safer environment for all pets. Even if it is not a requirement at a particular facility, vaccination is still strongly recommended—dogs are at **greater risk of exposure** in environments where not all dogs are protected.

Canine Influenza spreads quickly, especially in places where pets are in close proximity, such as grooming salons, boarding kennels, daycare facilities, or even dog parks. It causes flu-like symptoms that may include **respiratory and gastrointestinal signs**, and in some cases, it can lead to **severe or even life-threatening illness**.

Dogs may shed the virus **before showing any signs of illness**, meaning an infected but asymptomatic dog can unknowingly infect others. This is why vaccination plays such a crucial role in preventing outbreaks.

- The initial CIV vaccination consists of **two doses, 3–4 weeks apart**.
- After the initial series, **a single booster is needed yearly** to maintain protection.
- For optimal immunity, we recommend completing the booster series **before any planned boarding or grooming** appointment.

2. Bordetella (Kennel Cough) Vaccine

The Bordetella vaccine helps protect against a highly contagious respiratory disease commonly referred to as "kennel cough." This illness causes inflammation of the respiratory tract, leading to **persistent coughing**, and in more severe cases, **difficulty breathing** or even **pneumonia**.

Because kennel cough spreads rapidly between dogs in close-contact environments—such as grooming salons, boarding facilities, dog parks, and training classes—vaccination is especially important for dogs that participate in these activities.

- Most grooming and boarding facilities **require** this vaccine due to how easily the disease spreads.
- Protection is especially important for young, senior, or immunocompromised dogs who may be more vulnerable to complications.

The Bordetella vaccine is generally administered **annually**, but in high-risk environments or for frequently boarded dogs, **every 6 months** may be recommended.

3. **Lyme Disease Vaccine**

Lyme disease is a tick-borne illness common in the Northeast and Great Lakes regions of the United States. It can cause symptoms such as fever, lethargy, joint pain or arthritis, and kidney disease. If your dog visits these areas, vaccination is strongly recommended to help protect against this serious disease. Along with vaccination, consistent tick prevention is essential to keep your pet safe.

4. **Senior Labwork Screening (Bloodwork and Urinalysis)**

Routine lab screening is essential for detecting disease early—often before any visible signs appear. Dogs are instinctively driven to hide signs of illness, a trait inherited from their wild ancestors where showing weakness could make them a target. As a result, many pets don't show symptoms until a condition is already advanced.

Senior labwork allows us to catch underlying health issues early, providing a critical opportunity to slow disease progression or even prevent it altogether. With early detection, we can tailor care to better support your dog's health, improve their quality of life, and potentially extend their lifespan.

5. **High Blood Pressure (Hypertension) Monitoring**

High blood pressure in pets can be caused by underlying conditions such as kidney disease, heart disease, or hormonal imbalances. Left unchecked, hypertension can lead to serious and irreversible complications—including blindness, strokes, heart failure, and worsening kidney damage.

Because the signs of high blood pressure are often subtle or absent until damage has occurred, early detection is critical. Routine monitoring allows for early intervention, helping to prevent these potentially devastating outcomes and support your pet's long-term health.

6. **Cardiac Screening**

Certain breeds such as Boxers, Cocker Spaniels, Dobermans, and Great Danes are genetically predisposed to cardiomyopathy—disease of the heart muscle. This condition can cause the heart to pump inefficiently, leading to poor oxygenation, exercise intolerance, abnormal heart rhythms (arrhythmias), collapse, heart failure, and even sudden death. Many pets do not show signs until the disease is advanced. Early detection through appropriate screening can help identify problems before clinical signs occur and allows for timely treatment, ultimately improving both the length and quality of your pet's life.

7. **Hepatitis Screening**

Breeds such as Cocker Spaniels, Dalmatians, Labradors, Standard Poodles, and West Highland White Terriers are genetically predisposed to hepatitis—an inflammatory liver disease. This condition can lead to chronic liver damage, scarring (cirrhosis), and ultimately liver failure if not detected early. Yearly lab testing is recommended for these breeds to monitor liver health. Early detection and intervention can significantly improve both the quality and length of your pet's life.

Please contact us if you have any additional questions or would like more information about preventative care. It has been our pleasure to care for your pet, and we look forward to continuing to support you in providing the care they need to live a happy, healthy, and long life!

