One of the saddest things is witnessing the joy and delight of a new puppy or kitten turn to sorrow when, a few days after it went to its new home; it succumbs to a horrible disease like parvovirus, distemper or snuffles. What makes it especially sad is that these diseases are preventable with correct vaccination

Sadly, very few of South African pet owners have their pets vaccinated on a regular basis. Less than 15% of dog owners and less than 10% of cat owners vaccinate annually. This means that every year a number of animals (and even people in the case of Rabies) die and many more suffer needlessly due to diseases that are preventable by vaccinating.

Puppies should be vaccinated from 6 weeks of age against Distempervirus, Parvovirus, Hepatitis virus, Adenovirus and Parainfluenza virus(5 in 1 vaccine). After this they will need a  booster vaccination in 3-4 weeks, with another booster following 3-4 weeks later.

Of these viruses, Parvovirus and Distemper is the two more common viruses causing severe disease in young puppies.

Parvovirus(or catflu) can affects dogs in two ways: heart failure (normally in young pups) and severe gastro-enteritis. Without treatment this disease kills puppies quickly. The virus also stays alive in the environment for months.

Distemper is a deadly contagious virus, which attacks the nervous system. Symptoms include fever, cough, enteritis, discharge from the eyes and nose, and often nervous symptoms. Distemper is usually fatal, especially in puppies.

In kittens, the basic 3-in-1 vaccine include Panleukopaenia, Rhinotracheitis and Calicivirus. They should be vaccinated at 8 weeks, with a booster vaccination 4 weeks later.

Rabies vaccinations are only given with the booster vaccinations after 12 weeks of age, and followed by a booster vaccination. Rabies is an extremely dangerous and fatal disease which can affect all mammals, including man. It is carried via the bite of an infected animal or contact with the saliva. Symptoms include excessive salivation, violent behaviour and viciousness and often, fear of water. All pet owners are responsible to have their pets vaccinated against this dreaded disease. It is one of the few viral diseases that can be spread to humans from animals and continues to claim the lives of people every year. Every dog or cat owner is obliged BY LAW to have his/her pets vaccinated annually against rabies. Every year lots of people die from this horrible disease and there is no cure.

There is other vaccinations your vet might consider including into your pet’s vaccination protocol, but this will depend on your pet’s daily life and the risk of contracting the disease. Some diseases are less prevalent in some areas and the vaccination against it might not be warranted. Here is a list of some of the diseases that might need to be considered:

Dogs: Kennel cough, Leptospirosis

Cats: Bordetella bronchiseptica, Feline Leukemia Virus

By vaccinating our pets we ensure that they are immune to these diseases when they get exposed to them, and we will prevent the spread of these diseases, including rabies. It also makes sense when comparing the cost of prevention to the cost of trying to treat some of these diseases.

So remember, **DON’T WAIT, VACCINATE!**