

# Vaccination guidelines: Sourcing, storage, and administration

If you decide to vaccinate your dogs yourself, it is important to do so correctly. Failure to store or handle vaccines properly can lead to vaccine failure. This means your dogs may not be protected from disease. Improper vaccine administration wastes time and money and puts your dogs at risk.

## Key points

- **Make sure to always keep vaccines at the required temperatures.**
- **Always follow the directions on the vaccination packaging.**
- **Ask your veterinarian for advice on vaccination schedules, necessary vaccines, and how to administer them.**



## Getting started

- Follow recommended vaccination schedules.
- Ask your veterinarian to train you to administer vaccines.
- Know how and where to administer each vaccine. Incorrect administration decreases the efficacy of the vaccine.
- Know the age limits for vaccines – they vary with vaccine and manufacturer.
- Many states require a licensed veterinarian to administer rabies vaccines. There are also minimum age requirements for the rabies vaccine.

## Getting and shipping vaccines

- Buy vaccines from a reputable source, such as a veterinarian. If you use an online retailer, make sure they provide refrigerated overnight shipping.
- If you pick up and transport vaccines yourself, keep them at required temperatures as labelled. Use an insulated cooler with ice or cold packs and a thermometer.
- Avoid direct contact between vaccine vials and ice or cold packs. Use bubble wrap or other insulation around vials.

## Storing vaccines

- Follow all guidelines for storage included on vaccine packaging.
- Do not expose vaccines to freezing temperatures, sunlight, or excessive heat. Discard any vaccines that freeze.
- Keep vaccines in their original packaging.
- Keep vaccines at least 2 inches away from refrigerator walls.
- Do not store human food in the same refrigerator as vaccines.
- Most vaccines need storage between 35°F and 45°F.
- Have a refrigerator thermometer that tracks minimum and maximum temperatures. Some models include an alarm if temperatures fall outside the recommended range.



# Preparation and administration of vaccines



- Check expiration dates before administering a vaccine.
- Follow supplied instructions for the preparation, activation, and administration of vaccines, including use of diluents.
- Use vaccines within an hour of reconstitution.
- Use vaccines quickly after removing from refrigerated storage. Depending on ambient temperatures, use within an hour.
- When vaccinating multiple dogs: keep vaccines in a small cooler on your work cart to ensure they do not get too warm.
- Use a new, sterile needle and syringe for each vaccination. Replace the needle after drawing up the vaccine into the syringe, before injection.
- Check multi-use vaccine vials routinely for contamination (debris, discoloration).
- Administer vaccines with clean hands in a clean area.
- Do not combine different vaccines with one another into the same vial or syringe.
- Give a full vaccine dose as recommended for age group.
- Vaccine dose is not based on dog size. If you have questions, discuss vaccine dosage with your veterinarian.



## Safety and record keeping

- Only vaccinate healthy animals. Do not vaccinate animals who are sick, have diarrhea or have a fever.
- Do not wipe the dog's skin with alcohol before giving a vaccine. This can contaminate the vaccine.
- Monitor for adverse reactions after vaccination. Contact a veterinarian immediately if you notice any of the following: salivation, vomiting, diarrhea, hives, or difficulty breathing.
- Lethargy is a normal response to vaccination, but should resolve within two days. If you continue to observe lethargy in your dog after two days, contact your veterinarian.
- Keep records – track manufacturer, lot number, expiration date, and type of vaccine for each dog.
- Dispose of needles/syringes appropriately. They are hazardous waste. Place used needles/syringes in a sharps container immediately after use. Every community has its own guidelines for waste disposal. See <https://safeneedledisposal.org/> for more information.

### Resources:

**AAHA Vaccine storage and handling** <https://www.aaha.org/aaha-guidelines/2022-aaha-canine-vaccination-guidelines/vaccine-storage-and-handling/>

**Maddie's Fund Proper Use and Handling of Vaccines in Animal Shelters**

<https://www.maddiesfund.org/proper-use-and-handling-of-vaccines-in-animal-shelters.htm>

**Revival Animal Health Vaccine Storage: How to Store Vaccines**

<https://www.revivalanimal.com/learning-center/vaccine-storage-how-to-store-vaccines>