

Immunity—A Little Word That Means So Much

By:Christine L. Swingle

Vaccination does not equate to or guarantee immunity. I learned that immunity is not controlled entirely by antibody levels, as was once thought, but instead by memory cells. Memory cells are B and T lymphocytes, white blood cells that stand ready in the body to respond with protective antibodies when challenged by a disease agent. Memory cells, once programmed, persist for the lifetime of the animal. Therefore, as I understand it, it is possible to have low antibody levels (or titer) and still have protective immunity.

Puppies receive antibodies through their mother's milk (colostrum) the very first time they nurse. This natural protection can last up to 8 to 12 plus weeks at which time the maternally derived antibodies wear off. This is one reason why, in my opinion, if one chooses to give minimal vaccinations to puppies, they should do a nomograph of the mother, which is based on the antibody titers of the dam and will determine exactly when the puppies should be vaccinated. Dr. Dodds stated that this is one reason why puppies should **NOT** be vaccinated at less than 8 weeks of age. Maternal immunity will neutralize the vaccine and only a few will be protected. Vaccinations given 2 weeks apart suppress rather than stimulate the immune system. According to the studies of Ronald Schultz, Ph.D., DVM, Professor and Chair of the Dept. of Pathobiological Sciences, School of Veterinary Medicine, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and I would think this would be without the results of a nomograph, he recommends administering the core puppy vaccinations (distemper, parvo & adenovirus) no more frequent than every 4 weeks therefore a vaccination series is given at 2, 3, and 4 months of age and again at 1 year with a modified live virus, puppies program memory cells that survive for life, **providing lifelong immunity.**

Dogs' immune systems mature fully at 6 months of age. If a modified live virus (MLV) vaccine is given after 6 months, it produces immunity, which is good for the life of the pet (e.g. canine distemper, parvo).

The Natural Way to Immunity

Before vaccines were created, I think it safe to say that man and beast developed natural immunity. They had to or else they would be extinct. It came down to survival of the fittest in more ways than one. Those that fought a disease and lived developed immunity. Those that didn't died. I truly believe that NR dogs are more "fit" than dogs living the Factor of Three, which is kibble fed, vaccinated and given flea/tick/heartworm chemicals. The original and natural way to develop immunity to diseases is through natural, daily exposure. I find nothing wrong with doing it the old fashioned way, and I question the practice of injecting a virus directly into the bloodstream of my dogs. I also question what is in that vaccine.

In a paper prepared by Harold Buttram, MD, and John Chris Hoffman, entitled, "**Vaccinations and Immune Malfunction**", the authors state, "The natural immunity of a healthy person is

based on a series of body bypassing several important defense and balancing mechanisms. This is the same for animals."

That brings up a good point. Christie Keith, Caber Feidh Scottish Deerhounds, in her article, "**No Vaccines At All?**" said, "We question the effect of injecting a disease into our dogs, thus putting a virus directly into the bloodstream that normally enters only through the mouth, respiratory system, etc. bypassing the entire primary immune response that occurs in the mucous membranes."

I understand that many people still believe that vaccines are necessary to protect animals from disease and that vaccination is the only way to accomplish this, but that's not true. No one knowingly wants their cherished companion to come down with disease, but how many of us have actually questioned the practice of vaccination? No vaccine guarantees immunity, and we have heard of vaccines causing the disease they were meant to protect against. To be fair and balanced, natural immunity isn't a guarantee either, and one vital reason we all need to be aware of the various canine diseases, but my records show that since 1996, thirty-nine of my NR puppies, which were allowed to develop natural immunity, and received no vaccines with their new guardians, are all thriving today.

Vaccines – Its What's In Them!

Most veterinarians tell us vaccines are safe. The pharmaceutical companies tell us they are safe, although they won't divulge how they are made or what goes into them. How can anyone claim that vaccines are safe when no long-term studies have been conducted to show the long-term effects of vaccines on dogs? Also, according to Dr. Dodds, there is tremendous evidence that vaccinations can cause skin problems, arthritis, cancer, leukemia, aggression, autoimmune disease, and even death.

While I admit to support natural immunity and believe that vaccinations cause more harm than good, far be it for me to tell you to stop vaccinating your animals. That has to be the informed and educated choice of each individual. Supporting natural immunity is not the only option on the table. Minimal, core vaccinations given today at the appropriate times to puppies can also be considered and again, typically provides life-long immunity. It is the opinion of Dr. Dodds that totally unnecessary vaccinations include those for Lyme disease, corona virus, canine hepatitis, leptospirosis, bordatella and parainfluenza.

Opinion is very much divided and the same controversy is raging on the topic of vaccinating children. Viera Scheibner, Ph.D., noted author of Vaccination: 100 years of Orthodox Research Shows that Vaccines Represent a Medical Assault on the Immune System, found no evidence that vaccines are safe or effective and vaccines are highly noxious. They contain formaldehyde, aluminum phosphate, thiomersal (mercury compound), foreign proteins (antigens) and contaminating animal proteins and viruses from the tissues used as growth medium to culture the viral and bacterial components of vaccines. None of these substances should ever be injected into human beings. They erode the immune system and alter the immunological response to diseases.

Of importance to note, thimerosal is a mercury-based preservative which is nearly 50% mercury by weight. Thimerosal was first introduced in vaccines by Eli Lilly in the 1930's. Thimerosal is a very inflammatory neurotoxin and genetic mutator and Pittman Moore Animal Pharmaceutical Company warned against its safety "even in dog serum" to Eli Lilly Company in 1935. Pittman Moore found that over 50% of vaccinated dogs suffered inflammatory reactions to Thimerosal. These safety issues were raised in Congressional testimony several times and the correspondence from Pittman Moore to Eli Lilly is a part of Congressional Hearings testimony on the dangers of mercury in vaccines. Despite this, Thimerosal is still used as a preservative in a staggering number of vaccinations for both humans and dogs

Pat McKay, in her book, Natural Immunity, Why You Should Not Vaccinate, added a few more ingredients to the pot. She wrote that vaccines include "decayed animals, diseased blood, sera, bacteria, viruses, fungi, mucous, pus, urine, feces, antibiotics, formaldehyde, mercury derivatives, acetone, aluminum and carbolic acid put into a mixture; shot through our greatest protector, our skin; directly into our blood system, and this is the answer to keeping us free from disease." How safe can it be to inject a foreign substance into a body that contains, among other things, mercury and formaldehyde? Should mercury, which is poisonous, be injected into a body, no matter how small the amount? Adjuvants (substances added in order to elicit a more marked immune response) such as mercury derivatives and aluminum hydroxide are considered carcinogens.

No Scientific Basis for Annual Boosters – The Big Lie or a Big Mistake?

Annual boosters boost nothing so how silly to call them that. Either an animal has immunity or it doesn't. If it has immunity when the "annual" is suggested, it will not boost immunity. How many of us have taken the practice of annual revaccination on faith alone, without questioning, because our veterinarians said we should? They are only following what the vaccine manufacturers recommend. Do you give your animals annual vaccinations? Why?

There is no scientific documentation to back up label claims for annual administration of vaccines! Dr. Schultz, the renowned Veterinary Immunologist, states that "annual revaccination provides no benefit and may increase the risk for adverse reactions."

To vaccinate, to minimally vaccinate, or not to vaccinate at all should be the **informed decision** of each person but it's the responsibility of each of us to educate ourselves in order to make that informed choice. Don't just leave it up to your vet. You are the advocate for your companions. In 1978, Dr. Schultz and a colleague, Dr. Fred Scott developed and published a vaccination protocol that today is now pretty much accepted by the veterinarian community. This changed vaccination protocol addresses the yearly vaccination issue because of the **"lack of scientific evidence to support the practice of annual vaccination and increasing documentation showing that over-vaccinating has been associated with side effects."** One would think everyone would want to do a little research and re-examine the facts about vaccination. So why did it take the mainstream allopathic veterinarian community so long to finally admit this, although not all veterinarians have embraced the news and many more are still not sharing this important information with their clients so that the client can make an informed choice. See, it is up to each of us to get educated. Many veterinarians are continuing to recommend and

administer yearly revaccinations and they still refer to them as boosters. In my opinion, this is unethical and shameful, especially when their own textbook, Kirk's Current Veterinary Therapy XI, Chapter – Canine and Feline Vaccines, by Dr. Phillips and Dr. Schultz, states, "**A practice that was started many years ago and that lacks scientific validity or verification is annual revaccinations. Almost without exception, there is no immunologic requirement for annual revaccination. Immunity to viruses persists for years or for the life of the animal...**".

I applaud the veterinarians who inform and work with their clients with the companion's best interest in mind especially if that client still chooses to vaccinate. Still, I would like to see more allopathic veterinarians respect the guardian's right to choose not to vaccinate and not chastise them with fear, ridicule and even going so far as to say they won't treat the dog if it isn't vaccinated! Everyone needs to keep an open mind. Kennel owners, obedience class trainers, etc. also need to change with the times. Gone are the days when dogs need to be "up-to-date" on all shots. Thankfully, some are accepting titer results instead of vaccination certificates but more education needs to happen.

One last point to make – an unhealthy dog should NEVER be vaccinated. Even the manufacturer puts on its vaccine label that only healthy dogs should be vaccinated. Wouldn't you think someone would take notice? An unhealthy dog can have an ear infection or runny eye, allergies or arthritis, diabetes or cancer. No animal that is stressed should ever be vaccinated, and that includes animals going in for dental cleanings, spaying and neutering or other surgeries, or bitches in heat or pregnant, etc. In What Vets Don't Tell You About Vaccines, by Catherine O' Driscoll, she says "vets are warned not to vaccinate dogs who are taking immunosuppressant drugs (corticosteroids, for example, suppress the immune system, yet these are recommended when dogs experience hypersensitivity reactions to vaccines). Problem is, there are veterinarians who do vaccinate in all the above situations.

Parvo – It Doesn't Always Have To Be A Tragedy

That being said, this article would not be complete without sharing an incredible experience that happened many years ago. One thing I firmly understand is that there are no guarantees in life and sometimes disease can happen. Therefore, one needs to be prepared for any situation. I typically breed and raise one litter a year, if that. In early 2002, however, I ended up with two litters born about one week apart. Both litters were naturally reared, weaned to raw and were developing their natural immunity. At about eight and nine weeks of age, a few pups from each litter developed diarrhea, but continued to eat, be very alert and active. I did a microscopic exam of their stools and, as it has been for 38 years with all my Westies, no internal parasites were found. I began my herbal and homeopathic treatments for diarrhea. Stools formed for a few days but then became loose again. There was never any bloody diarrhea and only a few pups had some episodes of vomiting. To make a long story short, only one of the pups gave me concern because she stopped eating. I took her to my allopathic veterinarian and parvo was confirmed. I was sent home with glucose, fluids and antibiotics for this puppy. Although my allopathic veterinarian was not optimistic, I accepted this diagnosis as a true test of the pioneer spirit. I began to channel all the positive energy I could to my puppies.

Upon arriving home, I immediately contacted my homeopathic veterinarian who was Dr. Michele Yasson at that time. After taking a complete history of the pups and the events, the ever-

calm Dr. Yasson instructed me on homeopathic remedies I should give all the pups. I also gave all the adults parvo nosodes, because they were in a challenged situation, although none were sick. As it turned out, I never had to start the antibiotics on the sickest pup and only gave fluids twice, along with dextrose support a few times. Within two days of starting the homeopathic remedies, this puppy, to my amazement, rallied and started eating. All the puppies that had diarrhea or other symptoms bounced back incredibly fast, too.

Both litters were in the same area and my adult dogs, including Sierra, then 15 years of age, were exposed to these puppies. Not one other dog showed any symptoms or broke with parvo. It was a humbling experience and one that has made me stronger in my conviction that natural rearing works.

This episode was a challenge to my Westies, and to me! I came away from this experience greatly humbled, with great pride in my Westies and more respect for natural rearing and homeopathy. You see, instead of becoming fearful and thinking I better vaccinate my dogs from now on, I became totally convinced that natural rearing and homeopathy kept these pups from tragedy. I truly believe that if I had been feeding artificial foods, vaccinating and using chemicals, the outcome would have been tragically different. The pups' immune systems would not have been healthy enough to fight the virus. My allopathic veterinarian was quite surprised when I told him the wonderful outcome – all puppies were back to normal! Dr. Yasson, on the other hand, was very optimistic from the start. As for this pioneer, another lesson was learned and another mountain had been conquered.

There is no reason why each of us cannot be informed about whether to vaccinate or not since there are many books and information available on the subject to read. Just be fair to yourself and read both sides of the debate. Each person has to choose their own path, and that path should be based on facts, not fear, close-mindedness or misinformation. My main focus is to continue to breed for truly healthier dogs, generation after generation. Winning in the show ring isn't the main focus any longer, although I firmly believe you CAN and should breed for good health and conformation. Until all breeders decide that health must be the first concern, and then decide to make a difference, I fear we will continue to see disease and illness plague our breed and take them from us younger and younger. It will take many, many generations of NR Westies to get that "true" health back. It's our choice, and the only way to make informed choices is by education, as Thomas Jefferson said so well in his quote, "*I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves, and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by **education**.*"--Thomas Jefferson, September 28, 1820

Don't we owe our Westies, our own breeds, and all dogs that much by educating ourselves?

Natural Immunity – Fifteen Years Later

Since I made that paradigm shift to natural rearing and discontinued all vaccinations in 1996, my Westies are doing great. That being said, I am not complacent but I take my choice very seriously. My oldest naturally reared West Highland White Terrier Vestry (American AKC

Champion Bonnie Brier Dealer's Choice) was born June 8, 1998. Weaned to his rightful species diet of raw foods, Vestry grew up to be a Best of Breed winning Westie. While being shown, Vestry was exposed to all sorts of dogs and venues and never "picked up" any disease. Today at 13 y.y (that's years young) he has never had so much as an ear infection or teeth cleaning. Ch. Bonnie Brier Sharp Shooter, or Pistol, recently finished his AKC championship as a Best of Breed and Group-placing Westie. Pistol is three years old and went out with a handler so you know he was exposed to all sorts of stuff. He is home now and as healthy as when he left.

Since 1996, all Bonnie Brier puppies start out by developing their natural immunity but I guide their exposure with commonsense. I stay in touch with all my NR Westie guardians so I am proud to say that all puppies and adults have never come down with any infectious disease. On June 22, 2008 and June 8th, 2009, my third generations of NR Westies were born and they are healthy with three more destined to finish their championships.

For me, supporting natural immunity took education, courage, commonsense, keeping your eyes open and one deep breath as I started the journey. One of my favorite quotes by Ralph Waldo Emerson is, "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." That's what pioneer's do.



Christine L. Swingle, exhibitor/holistic natural rearing breeder
Bonnie Brier West Highland White Terriers est. 1964
Since 1996 – raises 100% natural rearing way

Christine has been a hobby breeder/exhibitor of West Highland White Terriers since 1964, under the Bonnie Brier prefix. In limited breeding, she has produced 24 conformation champions and three obedience titled Westies, six being naturally reared since 1996, have been finished. That was the year she made the paradigm shift to raise her Westies 100% the natural rearing way: raw fed, natural immunity supported and without the use of toxic chemicals. Now retired she currently lives in Connecticut with 5 adult Westies and four NR puppies born Nov. 8th, 2011

www.BonnieBrierWesties.com