



If you have been reading this feature faithfully the past few months, you will know that we have been discussing how beneficial it is to take your favorite feline(s) to the veterinarian on a yearly basis. If you missed a few of the past articles, you're not too late to learn that shockingly cats visit the veterinarian an average of only 0.7 times per year versus the dog population that see their doctor an average of 1.5 visits per year. This last installment will deal with the much misunderstood topic of Rabies Vaccinations.

One of the most common things that I hear from owners is that they were told by a friend, and sometimes even another veterinarian, that cats don't need to be vaccinated against rabies. That is **WRONG!** Well, what about if your cat never, ever, goes outside – it's not needed then, right? **WRONG!** While section 95.21 of the Wisconsin statutes states that all dogs must be vaccinated in the state of Wisconsin, many local ordinances, including Madison, Middleton, Jefferson and Janesville all have the same requirements for cats as well. Fines for keeping a cat (or dog) above the age of five or six months old without a current rabies vaccination start at about \$100 and go up from there. Granted, no one is going door-to-door checking (that I've heard of), but if something comes up and an official asks, you are required to show proof of vaccination and sometimes licensing. If you still think that you live in an area that does not require cats to be vaccinated, you may want to check with your city or town's ordinances before risking getting a fine.

On the subject of rabies vaccines, I want to let you know that there are now options about how we vaccinate cats. For one thing, there are multiple vaccine choices out there. We do still have our old stand-by of a long acting three year vaccine that cats can receive after their first dose (which the first dose in a series is always good for 1 year), but there is also a safer, however shorter acting one year vaccine on the market. I bet you are asking "why they would bother to make a vaccine that is only approved for a shorter duration?", well, I will tell you. The original three year rabies vaccines have been blamed for causing a tumor called a "vaccine associated sarcoma" in a small number of cats (namely 1 in 5,000-10,000 cats). One company developed a vaccine that lacks an added chemical called an adjuvant that many believe may be the stimulator for these tumors. This vaccine is thought to be safer and less likely to lead to tumor formation. However, without the adjuvant, the vaccines haven't proven to give as long of a level of protection, so they are only approved for one year. Maybe in the future we will see these vaccines approved for a longer duration, but for now, that is all we have to work with. At our clinic we actually carry both vaccines and we give owners the choice of which vaccine they prefer to be used. Other clinics may only have one or the other vaccine depending on their beliefs and clinic philosophies. Finally the other option is to have your cat's rabies titer checked. Although this option is a lot more expensive than giving the vaccine and may not protect your pet from a quarantine situation if it bites or scratches someone, it is another option for animals that have had a bad reaction to a vaccine or whose health may be affected by the vaccine itself. Ask your veterinarian which options will be best for your pet.

Hopefully the take home message you will get from these last few articles is that taking your cat to the vet on at least a yearly basis is a wise decision. From a preventative level (which will help save money in the long run) to a legal level (which may help you save money in the long run too), plan on those yearly visits with your feline friend and stay informed!