GARDENING, WILDLIFE & PET CENTER

Keeping your pet healthy this winter

By Julie Johnson

Greetings all and Happy New Year!

I decided to write my first column dedicated to cold weather protection for our animals. I realize that all of us love and care for our animals all year round, and as an emergency disaster animal responder, I have witnessed the cruel effects of Mother Nature and pets firsthand. With this in mind, I wanted to share some tips to help you get through the cold months still ahead. For specific questions, please contact your veterinarian for help.

Horses are pretty sturdy, but there are a few things you can do to help winterize them.

*Check their water intake---some horses may break the ice in their water and do just fine, but other horses will not attempt to do this and they can become dehydrated fairly quickly. You may need to continually break that ice for them and keep a close eye on their intake to avoid impaction.

*If possible, provide them a cover to get out of the cold and wet weather. This does not have to be a full barn set up, but an area that has a cover with good air flow to allow them the choice.

*Decomposed Granite (DG) can provide a good ground cover for your horse to stand on, while allowing drainage of pooling or heavy rains.

Dogs are sturdy too, but need to stay dry in the winter.

*If their coat and skin become saturated and cold, it can quickly lead to frostbite and an abrupt change in their natural body temperature, which is normally between 100 and 102 degrees Fahrenheit. Just keep a dry towel handy and dry them off when they have had their share of frolicking. Toy breeds are especially susceptible to the cold, so try to limit their outdoor time.

*Dogs really do eat more in the cold months, so don't be alarmed if your pooch suddenly wants a little extra than the normal diet. Exercise in the house for twenty minutes will ensure your precious doesn't hold on to the extra weight come summer time, and will keep the boredom levels much lower.

Cats can actually be very susceptible to winter.

* An outdoor cats natural instinct may be to find a dark, warm place, but many younger cats have not fully developed their ability to get out of the weather. Frostbite and dehydration can generally be found in these younger cats in the winter, so if possible, give your outdoor cat a place to take refuge from the cold. Our natural wildlife predators may also see your cat as the next supper, so keep that in mind when providing the winter shelter location.

*If you have an indoor cat, don't let it outdoors. Your cat may not be aware of the dangers outside, and can quickly become disoriented and/or lost.

Finally, please don't leave your animals in a car in any weather. Your car acts like a deep freezer in the winter, much like it becomes a pressure cooker in the summer. Hopefully, we can all get through the winter with our pets a little more protected.

Thanks for stopping by!

Happy New Year from King's Castle Kennels!

By Jennifer King

We at Kings Castle Kennels are so glad that the New Year is here. We hope this year will bring in good tidings and a growth in our economy.

The topic that has been asked over the Christmas season due to all the new puppies and adult dogs that were given as Christmas gifts has been "what shots does my dog need?" The vaccination of puppies (puppy shots) is one of the crucial steps in assuring the puppy will have a healthy and happy puppyhood. The who, what, why, when, where, and how of vaccinations are complicated, and may vary from puppy to puppy. Always consult with your veterinarian to determine which vaccines are appropriate for your puppy. To better understand vaccines, it is important to understand how the puppy is protected from disease the first few weeks of its life.

Protection from the mother (maternal antibodies)

A newborn puppy is not naturally immune to diseases. However, it does have some antibody protection which is derived from its mother's blood via the placenta. The next level of immunity is from antibodies derived from the first milk. This is the milk produced from the time of birth and continuing for 36-48 hours. This antibody-rich milk is called colostrum. The puppy does not continue to receive antibodies through its mother's milk. It only receives antibodies until it is two days of age. All antibodies derived from the mother, either via her blood or colostrum are called maternal antibodies. It must be noted that the puppy will only receive antibodies against diseases for which the mother had been recently vaccinated against or exposed to. As an example, a mother that had NOT been vaccinated against or exposed to parvovirus, would not have any antibodies against parvovirus to pass along to her puppies. The puppies then would be susceptible to developing a parvovirus infection.

Window of susceptibility

The age at which puppies can effectively be immunized (protected) is proportional to the amount of antibodies the puppy received from its mother. High levels of maternal antibodies present in the puppies' bloodstream will block the effectiveness of a vaccine. When the maternal antibodies drop to a low enough level in the puppy, immunization (a commercial vaccine) will work.

The antibodies from the mother generally circulate in the newborn's blood for a number of weeks. There is a period of time from several days to several weeks in which the maternal antibodies are too low to provide protection against the disease, but too high to allow a vaccine to work. This period is called the window of susceptibility. This is the time when despite being vaccinated, a puppy or kitten can still contract the disease.

When should puppies be vaccinated?

The length and timing of the window of susceptibility is different in every litter, and even between individuals in a litter. A study of a cross section of different puppies showed that the age at which they were able to respond to a vaccine and develop protection (become immunized) covered a wide period of time. At six weeks of age, 25% of the puppies could be immunized. At 9 weeks of age, 40% of the puppies were able to respond to the vaccine. The number increased to 60% by 16 weeks of age, and by 18 weeks, 95% of the puppies were protected by the vaccine.

Almost all researchers agree that for puppies and kittens, we need to give at least three combination vaccinations and repeat these at one year of age.

Most veterinarians prefer to vaccinate puppies with a combination vaccine at six weeks of age initially, with boosters given every three weeks until the puppy is about sixteen weeks of age. They feel that this schedule will help protect the widest range of dogs. They realize that with this protocol, that they will be vaccinating some dogs that are not capable of responding, and will need to be revaccinating some dogs that have already responded and developed a protection. But without doing an individual test on each puppy, it is impossible to determine when the puppy's immune system will be best able to respond. They also realize that in the face of an infection, due to the window of susceptibility, some litters will contract a disease (e.g., parvo) despite being vaccinated. By using quality vaccines and an aggressive vaccination protocol, we can make this window of susceptibility as small as possible. The vaccination protocol may not be right for every puppy. Puppies that are not exposed to other dogs and have a very small chance of coming in contact with parvovirus, may not need to be vaccinated as frequently. At the same time, some 'high risk' puppies may need a more intense and aggressive vaccination program. It is best to work with your veterinarian on a vaccination protocol that is best for your individual puppy or kennel, taking into consideration your individual situation.

We wish you and your new family companions a Happy New year! For greater success, we provide training and problem solving for you and your pet. To be continued next month.

"Specializing in Dog Grooming and Training"
King's Castle Kennels
Brian and Jennifer King
tel• 619-478-2240
cell• 619-512-7247
Lake Morena, CA 91906
training@kingscastlekennels.com
grooming@kingscastlekennels.com

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Workshop instructors: Danielle Campbell, RCD Forester and David Janssen, Calfire Forester
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Lynn's Gardening Column will return next month

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