Vaccinations and Titer Tests

What is a titer test? A titer test is a blood test that can tell you your dog's current level of immunity to a certain virus. It does that by measuring the antibodies to a given disease in the blood. The test won't distinguish between whether your dog attained its immunity genetically or through a vaccine. It won't tell you how long your dog will continue to be protected in the future, and it won't tell you if antibodies have waned but your dog still has memory cells that will spring into action to secrete antibodies if they encounter the disease again. However, if your dogs titer level is adequate, it means that right now your dog does definitely have the antibodies to fight off a given disease.

Why vaccinate? Vaccinations can provide important protection from disease. Parvovirus and canine distemper are two very common diseases that can have severe consequences. Many young puppies die from dehydration as a complication of parvo every year.

Then why not vaccinate? Vaccinations can also cause harmful side effects. Some dogs have allergic reactions to them, some develop digestive, neurological, or skin disorders. Moreover, research has shown that most vaccines last much longer than a year.* If you think about it, we don't vaccinate humans yearly for most diseases, and the veterinary profession has yet to show us why we should do so for dogs.

So what do I do? WagVille recommends a combination of initial vaccinations followed by yearly titer tests and immune boosting practices. What boosts a dog's immune system? Healthy food, exercise, training and other mental stimulation help build a healthy immune system. Supplements like Transfer Factor (this is basically the concentrated portion of colostrum that helps the immune system; we sell it at WagVille) can help as well.

*Twark; Lisa, DVM , & Dodds; Jean W. DVM (2000). Clinical use of serum parvovirus and distemper virus antibody titers for determining revaccination strategies in healthy dogs. Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association. 217 No. 7, [1021-1024]