WVA Statement on the Benefits of Animal Vaccination Programs in Advancing Animal and Human Health

DRAFT

BACKGROUND

Vaccination plays an important role in preventive veterinary medicine and will continue to be a mainstay for promoting animal health and welfare as well as reducing the risk of human exposure to many zoonotic pathogens. Historically, immunization practices and vaccination protocols have contributed to significantly reduce the incidence of many life-threatening diseases.

The risks of not vaccinating can be significant, not only to the individual animal, but also to the population at large. The principle of herd immunity recognizes that vaccinating a large percentage of any given population of animals against a specific disease breaks or slows the chain of transmission of that disease. In addition, vaccination of large populations of animals can be an effective management tool to reduce the risk of primary infection as well as the risk of secondary bacterial infections. Effective vaccination programs broadly implemented are expected to decrease reliance on antimicrobials, which in turn will help reduce the risk of antimicrobial resistance.

Vaccinating animals can also benefit human and public health. Annually, tens of thousands of people die of rabies following bites from infected dogs. But in countries or communities in which vaccination of dogs against rabies is required, vaccinated dogs are identified and stray dogs are controlled, the incidence of human deaths from canine-transmitted rabies virus is near zero.

As with every medical procedure or treatment, there are also potential risks associated with the use of vaccines. The World Veterinary Association (WVA) believes it is incumbent on the global veterinary profession to help inform the public, and, in particular, companion animal owners and animal producers as to the benefits of vaccines in promoting advances in animal, human, and public health.

POLICY

The WVA supports promoting the value of vaccines in animals to reduce the risk of infectious and zoonotic disease, developing educational material for use by veterinarians to increase client education surrounding appropriate vaccination programs, and collaborating with other health professions to ensure sufficient resources to advance scientific understanding of vaccine pharmacology and immunology.
The WVA believes that the following items are key issues to consider when developing and implementing effective educational and advocacy efforts regarding vaccination:

- Vaccines have been used for over a century to effectively decrease morbidity and mortality associated with many infectious diseases, and in most cases, the benefits of scientifically sound vaccination programs outweigh potential risks.

- Animals must be physiologically healthy and immunologically competent to respond effectively and appropriately to vaccination.

- The best way to prevent infection is to prevent contamination and exposure of animals to bacteria and viruses. Sound animal management practices must include high levels of hygiene and appropriate sanitation and disinfection programs.

- Vaccination and revaccination programs for preventive health care should be designed to maintain the health of the vaccinated animals and public health (e.g., when vaccinating against a zoonotic disease such as rabies) while, at the same time, minimizing potential adverse effects to the vaccinated animals.

- Group immunity is an important benefit of effective vaccination programs and can be assessed by measuring vaccination rates together with the results of seroepidemiological surveys. Such assessments can be used to help promote vaccination of large populations of animals.

- Points that veterinarians must consider when developing vaccination/revaccination protocols for individual animals or groups of animals include age, physiological status, breed and health status of the target animal(s); environment, lifestyle, travel habits and risk of disease exposure; regional variations in disease prevalence; and known adverse events associated with the use of certain vaccines.

- The vaccination/revaccination needs of an individual patient or group should be assessed by a veterinarian on a regular basis as part of a comprehensive preventative health care strategy.

- The decision to administer any particular antigen should be based on the risk of an individual animal or herd of animals contracting the disease, and protocols may vary depending on what disease entities are prevalent in any given area. In any case, the applicant must follow the instructions of the summary characteristics products or label instructions.

- Adverse events to vaccination can occur as a direct reaction to the vaccine itself or indirectly because of inappropriate transport, storage or use of a vaccine.

- Current adverse event reporting systems need improvement in the capture, investigation, analysis and reporting of adverse events.
• All suspected adverse events (including protection failures) should be reported to the manufacturer and appropriate government agencies to allow investigation and help ensure the continued safety and efficacy of veterinary vaccines into the frame of pharmacovigilance programs.

1 This WVA statement on the benefits of animal vaccination programs in advancing animal and human health has been adapted from the Joint Statement by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA), and the Federation of European Veterinarians (FVE): https://www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Pages/joint-avma-fve-cvma-statement-benefits-animal-vaccination-programs.aspx.

Additional country- or region-specific vaccination principles are available from:
• AVMA www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Pages/Vaccination-Principles.aspx
• CVMA www.canadianveterinarians.net/documents/vaccination-protocols-for-dogs-and-cats