

# HARBOR ANIMAL HOSPITAL

"Embracing the Human-Animal Bond"

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## **KEEPING YOUR DOG HEALTHY AT DOG PARKS**

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Now that you have decided to let your dog have fun in a dog park, it is time to make sure that your pet is up-to-date on all recommended vaccines and dewormings.

Vaccine recommendations vary from one area to another, depending on the prevalence of certain diseases. These recommendations also vary from one dog to another depending on that pet's personal history, and their potential exposure to infectious disease. Talk to your veterinarian regarding specific vaccine recommendations for your dog.

In the Gig Harbor area, we generally recommend four vaccines for dogs that visit dog parks: DAP, Rabies, Leptospirosis and Bordetella.

The DAP vaccine is a "combination" vaccine that protects against the Distemper virus, hepatitis (Adeno virus) and Parvo virus. This vaccine is sometimes called a "distemper vaccine" or DHPP. All of these viruses cause serious illness in unvaccinated pets, and are spread via direct dog-to-dog contact or via fecal contamination. The DAP vaccine needs to be repeated at least every three years, and perhaps yearly (check with your veterinarian).

The Rabies vaccine is necessary in this area because we do have Rabies in our wildlife population, and the disease is fatal. There is no treatment. It is spread by dogs that have been bitten by wildlife, cats or other dogs, and can be spread to humans the same way. Occasionally, Rabies is spread when rabid animals lick open wounds on other animals. The Rabies vaccine is given every three years (except the first rabies vaccine which is good for one year.)

We recommend that your pet also be vaccinated for Leptospirosis if they spend much time at a dog park. This bacterial infection is found in this area of the country and is spread via the urine of dogs and wild animals (raccoons, squirrels, rats.) It is a very

serious illness that can cause kidney or liver failure. It is also potentially contagious to humans who come in contact with infected dog urine. This vaccine is given yearly. We recommend asking for the “4-way” Leptospirosis vaccine from your veterinarian, which provides the best protection from this disease.

The Bordetella vaccine is often called the “kennel cough vaccine” and helps to protect against this highly contagious bacterial infection. Kennel cough is generally a mild but irritating disease that is usually easy to treat. It causes a harsh, continual cough that can persist for weeks unless treated. It can occasionally cause a more severe disease such as pneumonia. The infection is spread via air contact with infected dogs. This vaccine is given every 6 to 12 months (ask your veterinarian.)

We also recommend giving your dog a “dewormer” medication on a regular basis if they visit dog parks, to help prevent intestinal parasites. Intestinal parasites such as round worms, hook worms or whip worms are spread via fecal contact. There are several common ways to prevent these parasites. Your veterinarian may prescribe a once or twice a year deworming tablet or powder to administer, or they may prescribe a monthly heartworm preventative which contains an intestinal dewormer in it.

If you notice that your pet has loose or watery bowel movements, be sure to take a stool sample to your veterinarian to check for parasites, including giardia. Giardia is a microscopic parasite that is spread via fecal contact and through fresh water. It is treated with special medication.

If you notice tapeworms on the outside of your dog’s stool sample (they look like grains of rice), then your veterinarian can prescribe medication to clear that up. Tapeworms are most commonly spread via your dog eating fleas, so good flea control is essential to preventing these parasites.

In the Gig Harbor area we see fleas all year, and wooded areas often have ticks as well. There are many good choices for external parasite control including products that are applied topically and products that are taken orally. All these products should be used monthly year round in the Gig Harbor area. Ask your veterinarian for their recommendations for external parasite control for your pet.

Preventing infectious diseases or parasites is easy by taking simple preventative measures. Dog parks are fun, enjoyable places for your dog to visit, and the benefits of being able to run and play with other dogs far outweighs the minor inconvenience of making sure your dog is up-to-date on vaccines and dewormings.