

If you drop your dog at a daycare, the first conversation you will have is rarely about playgroups or webcams. It is about shots. Vaccination rules are the backbone of safe group care. They protect the dogs, lower liability for staff, and make outbreak management possible instead of chaotic. Having run and consulted for several dog daycares, I can tell you that clear vaccine protocols separate the facilities that weather an infectious disease exposure from those that do not.

Why daycares insist on vaccines Vaccines reduce both the chance a dog will get sick and the amount of infectious virus or bacteria it sheds if it does. In a daycare, dogs share air, water bowls, toys, and close-contact play. A single infected dog can expose dozens in hours. The common infections here are contagious, fast-moving, and in some cases life-threatening. A strict vaccination policy is a core infection-control tool, alongside sanitation, cohorting, and staff training.

Common vaccinations most daycares require Across the industry, several vaccines are routinely required. The names below reflect typical practice; exact policies vary by state, management, and the individual facility's risk tolerance.

Rabies: This vaccine is legally required in most jurisdictions for dogs over a certain age. Daycares expect current rabies proof because rabies is universally fatal for mammals and because local law may require immediate notification and quarantine in the event of a bite.

Distemper/adenovirus/parvovirus/parainfluenza (commonly listed as DAP, DA2PP, or similar): These are core shots targeting highly contagious viruses. Parvovirus in particular survives in the environment and can cause severe illness in unvaccinated dogs. Daycare policies often require completion of the initial puppy series and a recent booster, typically within one to three years depending on the vaccine label and local practice.

Bordetella bronchiseptica: Often called kennel cough when paired with other agents, bordetella is highly contagious and spreads quickly in group settings. Many daycares insist on a bordetella vaccine administered within a short window prior to attendance, commonly every six to twelve months. Facilities may accept intranasal, oral, or injectable forms, but the intranasal/oral options tend to reduce spread sooner after administration.

Canine influenza: This respiratory virus can cause outbreaks in daycare if introduced. Several facilities require the canine influenza vaccine, especially in regions where outbreaks have previously occurred or where influenza has become more common. Because influenza strains can change, vaccination intervals and recommendations may evolve.

Leptospirosis: This bacterial disease spreads through water or urine and can infect people as well as dogs. Some daycares require leptospirosis vaccination if the facility is in a high-risk area or if dogs have outdoor access where exposure is possible.

Other considerations: titer testing, optional vaccines, and regional differences Some owners prefer to titer instead of re-vaccinating for distemper or parvovirus. Daycares vary on whether they accept titers. A titer shows protective antibodies but not against respiratory pathogens like bordetella or influenza for which titers are less standardized. Expect most daycares to accept titers for core systemic vaccines rarely, and to require more recent proof or vaccinations for respiratory pathogens.

Geography matters. In areas with known canine influenza activity, facilities are [hip hounds grooming](#) stricter. Near waterways or in rural settings, leptospirosis is more likely to be required. Facilities that run overnight boarding in addition to day care often have tougher requirements because staff are responsible for health 24/7.

Timing and documentation: what daycares actually check Daycares do three things with vaccine records: verify the dog has completed the initial series appropriate for its age, ensure vaccines are current within facility policy windows, and collect a copy of the veterinarian's signed record. Most facilities ask for a signed vaccination form from a licensed veterinarian, not owner-printed reminders from vaccine manufacturers. Some accept veterinarian phone verification.

For puppies, the typical timeline daycare prefers is completion of the core series. Many daycares will not allow dogs younger than 12 to 16 weeks into group play until they have completed their final puppy booster, usually given at around 16 weeks. Others will accept a partial series but require small-group or restricted-contact programs until full immunity is likely.

Bordetella and the kennel cough window Bordetella is an example where timing matters more than mere acceptance. Intranasal or oral bordetella vaccines often provide protection within 72 hours to a week. Injectable forms may take longer. Many daycares require the bordetella vaccine within six months of attendance, with some asking for an updated dose every six months because of waning immunity and the vaccine's imperfect protection against all organisms that cause kennel cough.

Handling exemptions and medical contraindications True medical exemptions are uncommon but legitimate. If a dog has a documented history of severe vaccine reaction, a veterinarian can provide a letter outlining the risk and recommending alternatives. Daycares balance that documentation with public safety; in most cases they will accept exemptions only with enhanced precautions, such as limited, supervised one-on-one play, vaccinated-only hours, or a temporary suspension during local outbreaks.

Allergic reactions, transient lethargy, or soreness do not typically qualify as exemptions. Facilities expect owners to work with their vets to find the safest path, which might include using different vaccine formulations or spacing doses differently.

How daycares enforce their policies and what that looks like in practice Enforcement is practical, not punitive. Front-office staff check records before the first drop-off and at regular intervals thereafter. Some facilities take photos of vaccine certificates, others upload PDFs into a management system. Many daycares perform quick physical checks at intake: body condition, coughing, runny eyes, discharges, or obvious signs of illness result in immediate refusal of entry for that day.

Facilities that operate with webcams and live-streamed play have additional incentive to enforce vaccine policies strictly, because owners watch and question staff actions in real time. Webcams are useful for transparency, but they do not replace the medical safeguards vaccines provide.

Vaccination plus other health requirements Vaccines are one piece of the health puzzle. Daycares commonly require recent negative fecal tests for parasites, current flea and tick prevention, and a signed health form confirming the dog is free of transmissible conditions. Grooming status sometimes matters; some facilities require dogs to be flea-free before attending.

Feeding procedures and routine at daycare Vaccination status affects daily operations indirectly by enabling normal feeding routines. In a facility where vaccines and parasite prevention are enforced, staff can safely rotate communal food puzzles, supervised meal groups, or structured feeding for portion control. Daycares that do not permit group feeding will still host individualized feeding with staff supervision to avoid resource guarding. When dogs have dietary sensitivities, owners label food clearly and staff follow a written feeding procedure to prevent mistakes.

A typical day care schedule and why vaccines matter for it A common day looks like this: arrival and health check, greeting and warm-up time, structured group play with rest breaks, enrichment and feeding, and final wind-down before pickup. Vaccines matter because the schedule assumes movement between groups, shared toys,

and brief physical contact. A contagious respiratory pathogen can spread during a single play session across multiple groups if vaccination gaps exist.

When outbreaks occur: containment, notification, and costs If a dog tests positive for a contagious disease, daycares trigger a response plan. That plan often includes immediate closure for cleaning, notification to exposed owners, and recommendations for veterinary assessment. Facilities with strong vaccine compliance typically see smaller clusters and fewer severe cases. Owners should expect transparent communication; responsible daycares notify all potentially exposed pets and provide guidance on signs to watch for.

Outbreaks also create financial pressure. Extended closures to sanitize the facility, paying staff during shutdowns, and potential reputational damage are immediate costs. Those realities explain why many daycares invest heavily in vaccination enforcement and documentation.

Special cases: puppies, seniors, and immune-compromised dogs Puppies present a challenge because they are gradually gaining immunity. Many daycares offer a graduated entry where young dogs attend reduced hours, participate in small groups, or attend training-focused sessions rather than full free-play. This reduces exposure while allowing socialization.

Seniors and immune-compromised dogs require individualized assessment. Some thrive in calm, supervised daycare; others fare better in low-stimulation, vaccinated-only cohorts. Staff training then includes recognizing subtle signs of stress or immunosuppression and knowing when to remove a dog from play.

Practical tips for owners: preparing paperwork, timing, and what to expect on drop-off Checklist of paperwork and items usually required by daycares:

1. A signed and dated vaccination record from a licensed veterinarian showing current rabies and core vaccines.
2. Proof of bordetella and, if required, canine influenza and leptospirosis within the facility's timeframe.
3. A recent fecal test result or signed vet statement confirming parasite control if the daycare requires it.
4. A completed intake form detailing feeding procedures, medications, and emergency contacts.
5. A signed agreement covering policies for illness, behavior, and emergency care.

Upload or bring copies and confirm acceptance before your dog's first day. Daycares that accept certificates emailed or uploaded to a client portal make the process smoother. Expect staff to glance through records at drop-off and to perform a brief visual exam. If your dog shows any signs of illness, the staff will refuse service and recommend veterinary evaluation.

Balancing risks and benefits: why some owners push back Some owners dislike frequent boosters or worry about overvaccination. There is scientific justification for spacing certain vaccines longer for individual dogs. Still, in a group care context, the calculus shifts. The collective benefit of broad, recent immunity is substantial. Facilities must weigh the small risk of adverse vaccine reactions against the significant risk of outbreaks among dozens of dogs.

If you object to a specific vaccine, discuss alternatives with both your veterinarian and the daycare manager. You may find compromise through titers, changed vaccine types, or restricted attendance under special conditions.

Real-world anecdotes and lessons learned I once saw a small facility lose two weeks of business because one unvaccinated dog introduced parvovirus. The dog had not completed its puppy series; the virus contaminated play areas and toys, and several unvaccinated puppies required hospitalization. The facility had to deep-clean, close for three days for disinfection, and communicate refund policies while paying staff. Owners were upset and some never returned.

Contrast that with a different daycare I worked with where a kennel cough case occurred. Because 95 percent of dogs there had bordetella and influenza vaccines, the coughing spread to only three dogs, all of which recovered quickly with minimal treatment. The manager promptly notified owners, separated symptomatic dogs, and temporarily suspended open play for 48 hours. That composed response kept most owners calm and minimized business disruption.

What to ask a daycare before you enroll your dog Ask about the specific vaccines they require and the timeframes for each. Find out whether they accept titers and under what conditions. Ask how they verify records, how they handle suspected illness at drop-off, and what their outbreak plan looks like. If your dog has a medical condition, ask whether they will accommodate a written veterinary exemption and what alternative arrangements they offer.

If the facility emphasizes webcam access, ask whether vaccination checks are performed in the same rigorous way as at facilities without webcams. Transparency about policy enforcement is a good sign of competence.

Final considerations for choosing the best dog day care The best facility balances strict medical safeguards with humane handling of individual dogs. Vaccination requirements indicate a facility that values prevention. Look for a place that documents policies clearly, enforces them consistently, and communicates promptly when issues arise. The combination of solid vaccination protocols, written feeding procedures, transparent schedules, and trained staff creates reliable daily routine and a safer environment for every dog that attends.

Vaccination requirements are not bureaucracy; they are practical shields that let dogs exercise, socialize, and enjoy daycare without turning a happy place into a vector for disease. Do your homework, prepare documentation, and expect managers to ask the right questions. Your diligence protects your dog and every dog in the playroom.

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