

Strong connections found between vaccine hesitancy and support for vaccinating pets

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Texas A&M University School of Public Health research on attitudes toward pet vaccination and how they may be linked with human vaccine hesitancy was the subject of a recent [study](#) recently published in the

journal *Vaccine*.

Simon Haeder, Ph.D., associate professor, analyzed data from an August 2023 [survey](#) of more than 2,000 dog and more than 1,400 cat owners to measure pet vaccination rates, perceptions of vaccines and support for pet vaccination requirements.

"Decreasing pet vaccination rates pose challenges to society for a number of reasons, including increased incidents of pet disease and death, increases in exposures for humans, the potential for further genetic adaptations of pathogens, as well as detrimental effects on veterinarians," Haeder said. "Many individuals consider their pets as part of the family and increases in [vaccine](#)-preventable diseases may also affect the financial and emotional health of owners."

The survey first asked respondents whether they owned a dog, a cat or both. Dog and [cat owners](#) were then surveyed about their pets' vaccine status for five diseases each for dogs and cats. These included rabies for dogs and cats, [canine parvovirus](#) and canine distemper for dogs, and feline panleukopenia and feline Bordetella for cats. The respondents then responded with levels of support for vaccination requirements for each of the listed diseases. The survey also queried respondents about perceived safety, efficacy and importance of the various vaccines.

In addition to pet vaccine-specific questions, the survey asked respondents about their level of trust in scientists, support for human vaccination mandates for children, [political ideology](#), religiosity, non-veterinary expenses and frequency of exposure of dogs to other dogs outside the household. Lastly, the survey measured perceptions of safety, efficacy and importance of human vaccines.

The survey found that an overwhelming majority of pet owners had vaccinated their dogs and cats against rabies, though cats were

vaccinated less often than dogs. Other core vaccines had slightly lower, but still high uptake, while there appeared to be more [hesitancy](#) toward non-core vaccines. Core vaccines are generally recommended for all pets regardless of lifestyle.

Further analysis found that perceptions of importance, efficacy and safety of vaccines served as a reasonable predictor for vaccine hesitancy. Additionally, these perceptions show an association with attitudes toward vaccination requirements. Haeder's analysis also found that pet owners without non-veterinary expenses such as boarding or training fees showed higher levels of vaccine hesitancy. Lastly, pet vaccination behaviors and perceptions appear to be less associated with political ideology than with human vaccines.

The findings of this study show a high level of confidence in vaccine safety, efficacy and importance for humans and pets. Additionally, the analysis found relations between vaccine hesitancy in humans and animals, with support for animal vaccine requirements being strongly associated with similar requirements for humans. This indicates the potential for spillover effects and the importance of further focus on [vaccine](#) hesitancy in humans and animals in research and public health efforts in the future.

"Concerns about growing hesitancy remain and should be taken seriously, for both pets and humans, before the United States falls below important thresholds to prevent major outbreaks of [vaccine-preventable diseases](#)," Haeder said.

More information: Simon F. Haeder, Assessing vaccine hesitancy and support for vaccination requirements for pets and potential Spillovers from humans, *Vaccine* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.vaccine.2023.10.061](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.vaccine.2023.10.061)

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