

Pet Talk Tuesdays – 5/10/2021

Nick Rusch:

8:35am, at The Source. It's time now, for Pet Talk Tuesday. We get a chance to chat with our friend, Dr. Marty Greer, at Veterinary Village in Lomira. Dr. Greer, good morning. How are you doing?

Dr. Marty Greer:

I'm doing great. Thank you.

Nick Rusch:

Super. We often, because it's the way it goes, we talk a lot about dogs, and we kind of touch on cats. Today, we're going to switch that around, and talk about kitties a little bit, right?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. I'm feeling a little guilty about leaving the cats out of the conversation. It's not that we don't discuss them. It's just that they don't ever seem to be front and center.

Nick Rusch:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

There's a lot of cat people out there, and I don't want them to feel like they're second class citizens, because cats are great companions, and great pets.

Nick Rusch:

Absolutely. I couldn't agree more. I often think too, that people tend to, just in general, gravitate more toward the dogs, for some reason. And-

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah.

Nick Rusch:

... I grew up in a farm environment, where you wouldn't think of being without cats. I love cats. I'm a big dog person, but I'm a big cat person, too.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Absolutely, and dogs are in your face in a way that cats aren't. So, unless it's 2:00 in the morning and the cat threw a hairball up on your pillow, then that's a different focus. But generally, we really think about our dogs as the dogs we go hiking with, the dogs we plan our days around. And cats are just sort of in the background. But they're amazing, wonderful, happy pets, and they're just great to live with. So I think there's some important things that have changed in feline medicine, that we need to bring up, and have some discussions about here.

Nick Rusch:

Okay. All right. Give us an idea of what those things are.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, the first thing, is a change in vaccination recommendations. And this one, kind of threw me, because I thought we had vaccines pretty well sorted out for dogs and cats. We changed dog vaccination protocols back in... Probably, 20 years ago. We started changing, to where we were doing vaccines every three years, as some of the dog vaccines have

changed. But cats, just the end of last year, the beginning of this year, there've been changes in a couple of things. One is making feline leukemia vaccinations, a core vaccine for kittens.

Now, that's kind of an odd word. There's core, and non-core vaccines. A core vaccine is the one that's recommended for every single cat that walks through my door. Non-core are vaccines that are based on lifestyle and life stage. So we kind of changed that up. It's not a 'one size fits all' for cats, or for dogs, for that matter. And we're very careful in our practice, in Veterinary Village, to tailor our vaccine protocols to lifestyle and life stage. I think that's an important thing to know, but kittens have not routinely been vaccinated for leukemia unless they're in a high risk situation. So this is kind of switcheroo for a lot of people.

Nick Rusch:

Now, when you talk about vaccinating a kitten, at what stage are we talking about? How old of a kitten are we dealing with?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, leukemia vaccinations should not be given under eight weeks of age. In general, we don't vaccinate kittens or puppies less than six weeks of age, unless they're in a really, really high risk, high density environment. For instance, if they're in a rescue or shelter, a large breeding facility that's got an outbreak; something along those lines. We usually start vaccinating somewhere between six and eight weeks. So kittens, we can vaccinate for distemper as early as six weeks, but we don't do leukemia until they're eight weeks old. And leukemia requires two vaccinations the first year, and then an annual booster. So we can keep them protected.

It's kind of interesting, because we think if our cat never goes outside, that the cat is protected. And in reality, there's a percentage of cats that come to new owners from farms, from strays, from shelters, from wherever; even from breeders, that can already be leukemia positive, when they get them. And in fact, we just had one of those two weeks ago, which is what inspired me to have this conversation today.

Nick Rusch:

It's interesting-

Dr. Marty Greer:

We had a client with a new kitten, and she was already leukemia positive. She reverted to a negative status, which is great news. Some cats will, but unfortunately, she came leukemia positive. So she was isolated from the other cats in the house.

Nick Rusch:

It's interesting that you can actually vaccinate for leukemia. It's something we certainly can't do in humans. Does this research, as often happens in the animal world, does this bode well for leukemia research in humans?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, at this point, leukemia hasn't been shown to have a viral basis in humans. It does in cattle, it does in cats. So far, we haven't shown that. They've been looking at that for a very long time. So I suspect that leukemia has a different cause-

Nick Rusch:

Different source.

Dr. Marty Greer:

... in humans, than it does in cats. Now, there's also lymphoma, and we can see lymphoma in humans. We see lymphoma in dogs. We see lymphoma in cats, which is lymph node cancer. And again, that can be related to feline leukemia, but it can be an isolated event. So that's what makes all of medicine, an art, and not so much a science. And the more smart we think we are, as it turns out, probably the less we really know. Because the more we discover, the

more we realize that there's a whole lot more of information out there, that we don't really have good answers to. So, that's a great question.

Nick Rusch:

To me, it's all related. And it's constant, because you're constantly learning, and you're constantly getting new information, which is why with the controversy about vaccinating for COVID among humans. I don't understand the controversy. We know vaccinations are good things. We get it. We get them for our animals, all the time. We get them for our kids in school, all the time. So I'm confused about the controversy. To me, it's a common sense thing. If you're taking your pets in to get them vaccinated, maybe you should get your own self vaccinated, too. Just a thought.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, yeah. We've known for over a hundred years, that vaccines are effective. And what's kind of interesting on the human side, there is actually one vaccine that prevents cancer on the human side. Are you aware of that?

Nick Rusch:

I'm not.

Dr. Marty Greer:

That's the human papilloma virus; HPV. They recommend vaccinating kids, and of course, I don't want to turn this into a medical show, because I'm not a human expert. But there is a vaccine for human papilloma virus. They recommend it for teenage kids. It is transmitted sexually. And so, for the parents who thinks that their kids are not sexually active, they need to think again. But it does cause head and neck cancer. My daughter is actually a nurse practitioner at Marshfield Clinic. And one of the most common cancers that they see in young people, is head and neck cancer related to the human papilloma virus.

If you read the literature, what scared a lot of people when they first brought this to market was, it said that there were kids that died during the vaccination series. But if you read the footnote to the paper, they have to report any adverse event, whether it's a dog, a cat, a human, a cow. Anything that happens during a vaccine trial, they have to report. Well, these kids died in car accidents. They didn't die from the vaccine. They died in car accidents. Well, why did they die in car accidents? Because that's the 'at risk' group of dying in car accidents; teenage kids that are learning to drive.

Nick Rusch:

Absolutely.

Dr. Marty Greer:

So, it freaked people out. And I think, some of them pushed back on vaccinating. But absolutely, we need to be really upfront about how important vaccines are, and how they save lives. Whether it's your cat, or your kid, or yourself. Yes, vaccines are really important.

Nick Rusch:

Right. Right. What else do we know in the world of cats that's new?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, we have a new flea and tick preventive that also does mites, and it does tapeworms. It's called Revolution Plus. It's applied topically over the back of the cat's neck. You don't have to chase the cat down, and try and shove a pill down them every month, because we all know that doesn't end well. So, that's a great new product, even cats that don't go outside. If you have a dog that goes in and out, and can bring fleas into the house, or can bring ticks into the house, they can take up residence on your cat. So it's important that we do use those products. They control intestinal parasites, they control heartworm, they control fleas and ticks. It's really cool what we can do with some of these new products that we have on the market. So I think that's really important.

And I think probably, the one thing that's the biggest problem for most cat owners is, we see kittens when they're kittens for their vaccinations. We spay them and neuter them when they're around six months old. And then, many times, we don't see those cats again until they're 17 or 18 years old. And then, they have thyroid disease, or kidney disease, or a combination of things, or cancer; one of those things. And people forget that cats need veterinary care, or they're reluctant to go in for veterinary care, because cats don't like riding in the car, and going for those fun trips, the way dogs too. Like if you say to your dog, "Hey, let's go for a ride." They'll race out to the car and hop in. And they were like, "Woo-hoo! We're going!" Cats, not so much.

So veterinarians can help your cat get in the carrier, and get to the practice, and get out of the car, and safely in and out of the veterinary clinic, with a couple of tools. One, of course, is training your cat to be familiar with the carrier, is great. So leave the carrier out. Number two is using a pheromone product called Feliway, which is a spray, or a room atomizer that can help calm the cat. Number three, we can use gabapentin, which is a really safe oral medication, that you can give the cat two doses prior to the time of their visit. And I will tell you, the cats that normally come in here hissing, and claws, and toenails, and teeth exposed, come in on gabapentin, and they're like, "Wow, man. This is great."

Nick Rusch:

They're chilled out!

Dr. Marty Greer:

We love these cats, because they're so much nicer to deal with. It's much less stress for us. It's much less stress for you. And most importantly, it's less stressful for the cat. So instead of having an unfortunate experience, it just makes life super easy. And then, the last thing is, Zylkene, and some of the other herbal preparations. We do have herbal preparations, but nothing works quite as reliably as gabapentin. And in our practice, even if we haven't seen your cat, I will send gabapentin home with you prior to your appointment. If you can call us and tell us, "My cat really isn't good on veterinary visits." We can get that product for you, and get it in your cat prior to the time of your appointment, so that you have a great experience. Because cat visits should be as good as dog visits.

It should be easy. It should be fun. And it should be really important medically, because once we see these cats getting to middle-age, if we can start doing routine annual blood work on these guys, we can pick up kidney disease. We can pick up thyroid disease. We can pick up diabetes, and other health concerns early enough, that we can manage them, and give your cat a nice long life expectancy. Instead of coming in, like I said, when they're 17 or 18 years old, and they've lost half of their body weight, and they're dehydrated, and they look terrible. We don't need to wait until cats get in that condition physically, to start providing medical care. Cats are sneaky, little creatures. They don't tell you they're sick, until they're really sick.

Nick Rusch:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

So you don't notice that they've lost five pounds, until one day, your neighbor comes over and says, "What happened? Is this a new cat?" And you're like, "No, it's the same cat we've always had." And she says to you, "But it's half the size." And you say, "Oh wow. I didn't notice." Because it really sneaked up on you, and cats hide their illnesses better than any species that we live with.

Nick Rusch:

Right. And the whole psychology between cats and dogs, you're so right, when you talk about... For dogs, it's an adventure to go to the vet sometimes. For some dogs anyway. Any time they get to go anywhere. For cats, it's like, "You know, I'm really comfortable right here. And you got me this nice little bed, and this nice little toy here, and I'm doing great. So you go do whatever nonsense you got to do. And I'm just going to hang here."

Dr. Marty Greer:

It's sort of like during COVID, the dogs are thrilled to have us home. They're like, "Wow, this is awesome. My people are here. They take me on four walks a day. I love this." The cat is like, "Excuse me, but you're interrupting my sleep patterns, and I can't get up and use the litter box like I usually do. So could you all please go back to school, and go back to work, because you're making me crazy." So yes, it's a completely different relationship that people have. Now, there are some cats that are dog-like and some dogs that are cat-like,-

Nick Rusch:

Sure.

Dr. Marty Greer:

But in general, you can make assumptions that there are differences between them. And yes, cats march to their own drummer, and do their own thing.

The other really cool thing that came to market a few years ago for cats, is a new form of cat feeder. It's made by Doc & Phoebe's. D-O-C, like doctor; Doc & Phoebe's. It's a cool little cat feeder that has a measuring spoon that goes with it. And there are little feeders that you put your cat's dry kibble in, and then you hide those around the house. One day you hide it in your shoe, and one day hide it in your closet. Another day you hide it in the basement. And it gives the cats the opportunity to get up during the day, go hunting for their food, look for their food. And it was developed by a veterinarian. It's now sold readily on lots of websites, so it's not difficult to find. But it's really cool, because it gives your cat exercise. It gives them some mental stimulation. It cuts down on their stress levels of being bored. It cuts down on their weight, because they're up moving around, and you're actually measuring and monitoring how much they're eating.

So, like I said, there's some really neat things that have come to market. Not just cool cat toys, but some really important things that help cats to have better lifestyles. There are now collars that have a little tag on them. So if you have multiple cats, there are electronic feeders. So the tag on one cat will let them into the feeder, when the tag on the other cat won't. So if you have an overweight cat, it will keep that cat from eating the skinny little cat's food, or the kitten's food. So there's these new things have come to market that are just amazing.

Nick Rusch:

That is amazing. I like that. Hide the food, and the cat has to find it. I wish I had that when the kids were young. That's what we should have done.

Dr. Marty Greer:

You mean you were going to hide your kids' food?

Nick Rusch:

Oh, yeah, yeah. Make them work a little bit. Make them come on.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right.

Nick Rusch:

I had to work to buy it. They should have to work to eat it. I'm all right with that. When you think about it the neat thing about that is, that plays into the cat's natural instinct, anyway. They're hunters to begin with. And as you said, it stimulates them, gives them something to do. And I would imagine, it's probably fun for them.

Dr. Marty Greer:

I think it is. It's certainly better than just moving across the couch as the sun goes across, and having that be the only activity that they have all day. And then we wonder why they're bored, or fat or unhappy, or scratching on things that they shouldn't be, because we haven't given them a lifestyle that really suits their needs.

There's also a really great website done by the Ohio State University. It's called The Indoor Cat Initiative. So if you have any behavior problems with your cat, it's a great resource for litter box training, for scratching, biting, inappropriate scratching; any of the behavior issues that you may be experiencing with your cats. And the number one behavior issue that we see, is the use of a litter box. So I don't want to under-emphasize the importance of litter box hygiene; having appropriate numbers of litter boxes. The rule is, one per cat, plus a spare, so that there's always a clean box.

The rule is, don't make the cat litter more than two inches deep in the bottom of the box, because cats don't like to sink in. If your cat's not using the litter box, you need to really look carefully at why, because cats don't miss. They don't accidentally urinate someplace inappropriately. If they're not using the litter box, either they have a bladder problem, or they have a behavior issue that relates to the litter box not being clean, or somehow not being appropriate for them. Maybe something bad happened, like when they urinated, it hurt. So they don't go back to it. We need to make sure that we appropriately provide litter boxes.

The American household is not set up for an appropriate place to put a litter box. There's no convenient place; the laundry room, the kitchen, the bedroom, the bathroom. There's no good place to put a litter box. So we have to come up with some good solutions for those. And that may mean coming up with a covered litter box, or some kinds of litter you can offer your cats; different kinds of litters, different kinds of litter boxes. And see what you can determine is their most appealing source. And not every cat has the same preference. So if you have four cats, you may have to have four different kinds of cat litter, because they are cats, and they can.

Nick Rusch:

Boy, that sounds like a lot of work.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, it can be. We love our cats. And we certainly want to accommodate people. In our hospital, we have a special hospitalization suite for the cats, so they don't have to look at dogs or hear dogs. We have a special exam room set up for cats, so that they don't again, have to be where the dogs are smelly, and barking, and drooling, and doing the things that... The cats rule, the dogs drool, kind of thing. There's a lot of things that we can do, to make our veterinary visits better. We can do some things to make our lifestyle for our cats in our homes better. So if you're really a cat person, and you want to spend a few minutes looking online, you're going to find some pretty amazing sources of information, and some great tools. Great new medications to help make your cat's lifestyle easier. But mostly, don't forget, they need veterinary care.

Nick Rusch:

Absolutely. And give us your contact information, Doctor, where you are available. I know that you guys can know everything that the kitties need, and the dogs as well.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Sure. We're at Highway 41 and 49, just out Fond-du-Lac, at the Brownsville exit. Even though our address is Lomira, we're at the Brownsville exit. Easy to find us. We're open seven days a week. We're here on Sunday afternoons. We're here all day Saturday. We are taking new clients for wellness visits. Our phone number is (920) 269-4000. And our website is smallanimalclinic.com. You can also email vv@k9stork.com or you can text us at (920) 539-7164. Every now and then, the phone lines don't work, so sometimes we have to fall back on other communication sources like smoke signals and emails. We're always happy to see you. Give us a call if you have any cat questions or dog questions, too. We're happy to help you out.

Nick Rusch:

All right. Always fun to talk about the kitties today. Like I said, I'm a big fan. We always talk about people getting along like cats and dogs, and I have to say, that on the farm, we very rarely had any problems. The cats and the dogs hung out together, and got along pretty well. I don't know why. If it was just a nice country setting for them, and they thought it was okay or what. But I really don't recall any big altercations. Every now and again, if somebody was in somebody else's food dish, there might be a bark or a hiss, but generally speaking, they seemed to get along okay.

Dr. Marty Greer:

I think when they grow up together, it's a lot easier, than if you just plunk somebody down in the household and say, "Okay, here's your new buddy. Get over it."

Nick Rusch:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

So I think, when they're born on the farm, or you bring a new pet into the house as a young one, they tend to have a better relationship, than if you just bring two adults together. So sometimes, those blended cat-dog families, can be a little challenging.

Nick Rusch:

Well, I know they still keep in touch at Christmas, but anyway. Veterinary Village, Dr. Marty Greer, it's our Pet Talk Tuesday. We always learn a lot, and have a lot of fun. Great job, Doctor. Thank you so much.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Thank you. Take care.

Nick Rusch:

You bet.