

Improve LYME VACCINE Compliance

By Wendy S. Myers, CVJ

The best way to protect patients is to advise pet owners of the importance of year-round preventatives, even during winter months, advises the Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC)¹. High-risk forecasts of Lyme disease persist in the Northeast, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the upper peninsula of Michigan. Higher than normal risk continues in North Dakota, northeastern South Dakota, southeastern Iowa, Illinois, and eastern Kentucky. Client conversations about vaccinating for Lyme disease need to happen before, during, and after appointments.

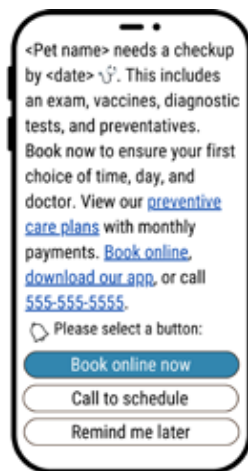
Before Appointments

Send recall notices 60 days ahead. Recalls are messages to clients who have patients due for care but haven't scheduled appointments. Busy spring and summer months see up to a 20 percent increase in appointments. Sending recall notices 60 days ahead lets you forward book and fill your future schedule.

Use a combination of texts and emails. Reaching clients multiple ways will increase response rates.² Texts should be 140 to 175 characters for the highest response rate. Keep email subject lines between 30 to 40 characters because 62 percent of emails are opened on mobile devices.³ The email body should be 50 to 125 words for response rates of 50 percent or higher.⁴

► Components that make this text effective include:

- Use the call to action of "needs" to indicate that preventive care is medically necessary.
- Add an emoji to increase open rates by 56 percent. Get free emojis at <https://getemoji.com>. Copy and paste emojis of dogs, cats, mosquitoes, hearts, paw prints, pills, veterinarians, syringes, stethoscopes, a pile of poo, and more.
- Keep the text short, listing four categories of exam, vaccines, diagnostic tests, and preventatives rather than specific services. A pet may have multiple diagnostic services due such as a heartworm/tick test, intestinal parasite screen, and early detection screen. "Diagnostic tests" is more concise.
- Use benefit statements of "**Book now to ensure your first choice of time, day, and doctor**" to lead clients to forward book.



Graphic courtesy of Wendy S. Myers, CVJ, Communication Solutions for Veterinarians

- Wellness plans with monthly payments remove financial obstacles. A study found 55 percent of wellness plan members visit practices more and 47 percent have a higher average charge per transaction.⁶
- Include hyperlinks and buttons that allow clients to digitally book. Buttons increase click-through rates by 15 percent over hyperlinks. Buttons offer yes-or-yes choices of "**Book online now**," "**Call to schedule**," or "**Remind me later**." If clients choose to be reminded later, send them another text and email in seven days.

List specific vaccines due on email recalls. A canine patient may be due for vaccines to protect from rabies, distemper, adenovirus, parvovirus, Bordetella, Leptospirosis, Lyme, canine influenza, and/or Western diamondback rattlesnake toxoid. List each—especially rabies—because most state laws require it.

Send online forms with confirmations. Clients will complete and submit forms before appointments. This saves 10 to 15 minutes that technicians and assistants previously spent asking history questions at the start of appointments. Doctors and technicians can review clients' answers before exams and ask follow-up questions, resulting in more efficient use of exam time. **Ask questions about Lyme disease on wellness forms such as:**

- Have you seen any fleas or ticks on your pet?
- Which flea/tick preventative do you use, and when did you give the last dose?
- Do you travel with your dog to areas where ticks or mosquitoes may be present?
- Have you ever found a tick on your dog or on any other pet or person in your home?

During Appointments

Screen medical records for client compliance before exams. Veterinarians and technicians should have a game plan before exam doors swing. Which vaccines and diagnostic tests are due? When were the last preventatives purchased, and how many doses were sold? Is the client sharing preventatives among multiple pets?

Preview services at the beginning of exams. The technician or assistant will say, "I am <technician name>, who will assist Dr. <Name>. <Pet name> needs an exam and vaccines for distemper/Parvo, Rabies, Bordetella, Leptospirosis, and Lyme. We will test for intestinal parasites and heartworm/tick diseases. Max needs refills of flea/tick and heartworm preventatives. I will tell you about instant rebates so you may save the most. What questions may I answer before we begin?" Use the action word of "**needs**" when discussing services due rather than the wobble word of "**recommend**." Clients may hear that Lyme vaccination is just a recommendation and is not medically necessary.

If the pet owner doesn't understand or declines Lyme vaccination, the technician will explain, "Lyme disease is transmitted to humans and animals through the bite of infected ticks. Symptoms may include lameness, swollen lymph nodes, joint swelling, fatigue, and loss of appetite. Lyme disease can cause serious kidney complications. Two boosters are given several weeks apart the first time your dog is vaccinated, and then it is given annually. Shall we vaccinate your dog for Lyme disease, or do you want to talk with the doctor?"⁸

Explain the pyramid of protection. Protecting dogs from Lyme disease is like a three-legged stool. The first leg is testing for tick-borne diseases, which is a recurring annual screen. Say "**recurring**" instead of "**routine**" to communicate that the test repeats annually and is medically necessary. The second leg is vaccinating for Lyme disease annually. The third leg is giving flea/tick preventatives monthly. This pyramid of protection is best. If you remove one of the three legs, the stool will fall over.

Have doctors reinforce protocols. Before the doctor enters the exam room, the technician will let the veterinarian know if a client questions or declines a vaccine. The veterinarian can explain local prevalence, health consequences, and cost of treatment. Additional information from an expert may persuade the pet owner.

Almost no one refuses when Dr. Chris Brockett, owner of Saratoga Veterinary Hospital in Wilton, N.Y., tells clients: "<Technician name> shared that you declined the vaccine for Lyme disease for your pet. We live at ground zero for Lyme disease in both pets and people. While core vaccines such as rabies, distemper, and parvovirus are important, the likelihood of your pet being exposed is quite small. On the other hand, the chances your pet will be exposed to Lyme disease are quite high. I know this because our doctors diagnose multiple dogs every week. Lyme disease can create chronic inflammatory disease and, in severe cases, kidney damage in your pet. Almost everyone I know has a friend with Lyme disease and those inflammatory problems. The vaccine is extremely safe and protects dogs against the disease they are most likely to encounter in their lives. Lyme vaccination is an important one to include with our services today. Shall I vaccinate your dog for Lyme disease, or do you need more information?"

After Appointments

Follow up if clients decline vaccines or other services.

The first "no" is not the final "no." Have technicians make medical callbacks one week later. Create a service reminder called "Lyme vaccine needed" that will print on the client's receipt and trigger a callback in seven days. The outpatient technician will call the client because they have an existing relationship, and the client is more likely to remember the technician who helped with last week's appointment.

SAY THIS: "This is <technician name> with <hospital name>. I enjoyed seeing you and <pet name> last week. Dr. <Name> asked me to follow up with you on our discussion about the need to vaccinate <pet name> for Lyme disease. Because <pet name> is current on a doctor's exam, we can schedule a technician appointment to give the Lyme vaccine. The cost of the vaccine is \$__. Our next available technician appointments are <date, time 1> or <date, time 2>. Which do you prefer?"

Use the doctor's name to bring credibility and authority to the call. Communicate that Lyme vaccination is medically necessary. Explain the vaccine cost and that paying for another doctor exam isn't required. Use the two-yes-options technique to nudge the client to schedule a technician appointment. If the client continues to decline, note the decision and callback in the patient record. Tell the client, "I will let Dr. <Name> know your decision and note it in <pet name>'s medical record. If you need more information about Lyme disease or want to move forward with vaccination, please call us. We appreciate the opportunity to care for <pet name>."

Education and persistence can have your team persuade more clients to say yes to Lyme vaccination for their pets. Patient and practice health will improve as a result.



About the Author

Best known as the "Queen of Scripts," Wendy Myers knows the right words will lead clients to accept your medical advice, driving patient and practice health. As founder of Communication Solutions for Veterinarians, she teaches practical skills through online courses, conferences, and onsite consulting. Wendy's experience as a partner in a specialty and emergency hospital helped her understand issues that owners and managers face. Learn how Wendy can train your team at [csvetscourses.com](https://www.csvetscourses.com).

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