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ACVM Programs and Appraisals
New Zealand Food Safety
Ministry for Primary Industries
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By Email

Submission on the reassessment of Vanguard Plus 5 (ACVM registration number A007448)

The New Zealand Veterinary Association Te Pae Kīrehe (NZVA) is the largest membership organisation representing veterinarians in New Zealand. We support members through leadership, education, standard setting and wellbeing support.

This submission is made on behalf of the Companion Animal Veterinarians Branch (CAV) of the NZVA and specifically addresses the risks and benefits of the Vanguard Plus 5 vaccine, focusing on the canine distemper virus (CDV) fraction and its safety in dogs.

CDV is a highly contagious and often fatal disease that affects dogs, causing respiratory, gastrointestinal and neurological symptoms. Given the severity of this disease, vaccination is an essential part of canine health management.

The CDV fraction in Vanguard Plus 5 is designed to stimulate a strong immune response in dogs, providing long-term protection. Modified live viral (MLV) vaccines like Vanguard Plus 5 are widely used due to their ability to induce robust and long-lasting immunity with fewer doses compared to inactivated vaccines.

The NZVA policy on the use of vaccines in dogs and cats emphasises that all pets should be appropriately immunised. The 2024 World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) guidelines for the vaccination of dogs and cats recommend that every dog and cat benefit from vaccination. This practice not only protects individual animals but also enhances “herd immunity,” thereby reducing the risk of contagious disease outbreaks within the community providing protection to those unable to be vaccinated.

Despite the effectiveness of vaccination programs, preventable diseases such as canine and feline parvovirus (also known as feline panleukopenia) continue to pose significant health threats in certain regions of New Zealand, especially in areas with low vaccination rates, which are often also areas of high socioeconomic deprivation. These diseases can cause severe illness and death in unvaccinated or inadequately vaccinated puppies and kittens. Thanks to widespread vaccination efforts, other serious diseases like canine distemper are now rarely seen in New Zealand.

Adverse events associated with vaccines are infrequent, and when they do occur, they are usually mild and result from the body’s natural immune response to the vaccination. A 2023 study, which tracked over 4.6 million dogs across more than 16 million clinic visits, reported an adverse event rate of only 19.4 per 10,000 visits (0.19%). Most side effects, such as temporary swelling at the injection site, mild fever, or lethargy, resolve without intervention. Severe adverse reactions, such as anaphylaxis and post-vaccinal encephalitis, are very rare. The benefits of vaccination significantly outweigh these risks. Maintaining high vaccination rates is essential to reducing the incidence and spread of these diseases, thereby safeguarding both individual pets and the wider animal community.

Post-vaccinal encephalitis specifically, is a rare but recognised risk associated with modified live viral vaccines, particularly those used for canine distemper vaccination. Literature reports its sporadic occurrence, but it is not specific to any one vaccine, manufacturer or country. Modified live vaccines are used extensively globally because of their proven excellent safety profiles and ability to provide long-lasting immunity, crucial to protecting animals over time.

As Vanguard Plus 5 undergoes reassessment, it is crucial to uphold public confidence in the importance of canine vaccinations in New Zealand. Vaccine hesitancy is an emerging issue that can lead to negative welfare outcomes

and may also impact the mental and physical health of veterinary professionals. Addressing concerns about vaccine safety is essential to maintaining trust and encouraging responsible vaccination practices.

We support the clear labeling of Vanguard Plus 5, as with all vaccines, to inform users of the potential symptoms of adverse events, ranging from mild to severe. This will help ensure that veterinarians and pet owners are fully informed and prepared to respond appropriately should any adverse reactions occur.

In conclusion, we strongly advocate for continued evidence based public and professional support for vaccination programs and encourage clear and informative product labeling to ensure confidence in vaccine safety and efficacy.

Nāku iti noa, nā,



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