

ALLERGY SHOTS VS. STEROID SHOTS

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Allergy shots and steroid shots are not the same thing but many people use the terminology interchangeably. For purposes of this list maybe we can try to standardize the terms.

Allergy shots are shots which are given to dogs when they have been tested for allergies, either skin testing or blood testing. The vet or dermatologist determines what they are reacting to and has a serum made up of these things that are causing the allergies. The dog gets shots usually once or twice a week from the serum. Tiny doses of the things that cause the allergies are injected so that the dog's immune system will start seeing them and over time, quit reacting to them. This whole process costs many hundreds of dollars so should be pretty obvious if it has been done.

Steroid shots are given to dogs who are acting like they have allergies. The steroids suppress the immune system so that the dogs can have some relief from the itching. The steroid shots are generally given once and last 2-3 weeks. They can also get pills to take daily or can have repeats of the steroid shots. These shots are sometimes thought of as "allergy" shots because they are given to suppress the allergic reaction but they are not really allergy shots. We try to limit the use of these steroid shots, esp. with younger dogs, because over time (years) they can be very damaging to a dog and can eventually cause other serious illnesses like Cushing's. However, if the dog is doing damage to their skin, one or two at the start of treatment can be a good thing to do. It gives the dog relief, stops the constant scratching which can damage the skin and lead to staph infections. And it can give time for the real treatments to be identified or to start to work. We often do this when we start a dog on Atopica which is actually modifying the immune system. It can give the Atopica time to get started so the dog doesn't have to continue to suffer. Note: If a dog is going to get skin allergy testing, DO NOT give steroids in any form since the skin tests cannot be done for several weeks after the dog has had a steroid. (Further note, these dogs cannot have antihistamines for 4 weeks either so they can really suffer through this period while their body clears these drugs.)

Another side benefit is that it can tell the vet a lot about what is going on. For example, if the Steroid shot does not help at all, the vet might take another look for mange or for yeast, two things that the steroid shots do not help. If it does help, then the vet can be pretty sure it isn't one of these two things. So to some extent it is diagnostic.

For this list, please try to use the term "Allergy shots" only if the dog is on real allergy shots and "steroid shots" when the dog is getting the stop gap steroids to give temporary relief for itching. Then we won't be confusing each other.