

Preventative Care for Cats

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Vaccine Recommendations for Cats

Cats make wonderful companions for many households. Compared to dogs, they usually have less grooming needs and require less training or exercise. However, it is important to provide them with proper preventative care to keep them healthy. Any new cats brought into your household should be taken to your veterinarian for a general health assessment and vaccines. Your veterinarian will make recommendations for vaccination and advise you on additional care issues, such as nutrition and parasite prevention. Vaccines that are considered “Core Vaccines” are recommended for all cats and include the vaccine for Upper Respiratory Disease and rabies virus. Feline Leukemia Virus and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus are “non-core vaccines” that will be recommended based on the risk factors for individual cats.

Feline Upper Respiratory Disease Complex

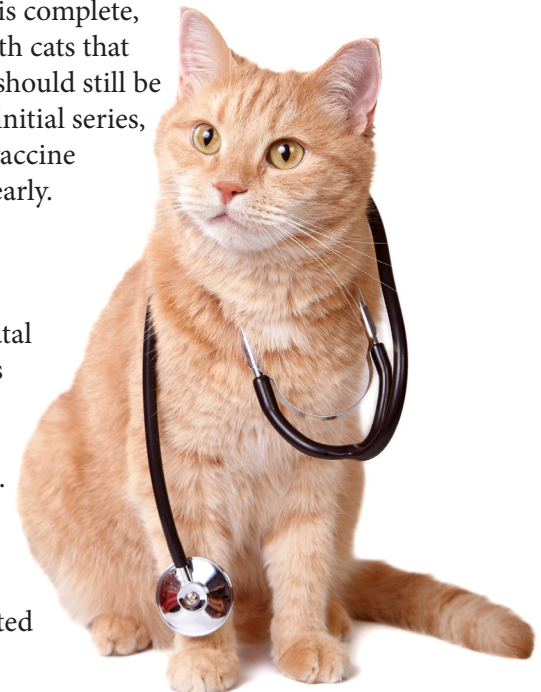
Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis (feline herpes virus), Calicivirus, and Panleukopenia (feline distemper) viruses, as well as the bacteria *Chlamydia Psittaci*, are common causes of upper respiratory infections in

cats. Panleukopenia is a virus that creates a variety of symptoms and can be fatal. The other three pathogens cause similar upper respiratory infections. All of these pathogens are contagious from cat to cat. Symptoms of upper respiratory disease include sneezing, runny nose, eye infections, fever and loss of appetite. These infections can be severe and, in cases of feline herpes virus, may cause reoccurring episodes throughout life. Luckily, there are vaccines available.

A vaccine for upper respiratory disease is considered a Core Vaccine, meaning it should be given to all cats and kittens regardless of whether they are indoor or outdoor. Multiple causes of upper respiratory infections are combined into the same vaccine for convenience. New cats/kittens with unknown vaccination status that are brought into your home should be quarantined or kept away from any other cats for at least 10 days and should be taken to your veterinarian for vaccinations as soon as possible. Kittens are recommended to have a series of at least three boosters that are given 2-4 weeks apart. Until the booster series is complete, kittens’ contact with cats that could be infected should still be limited. After the initial series, the combination vaccine should be given yearly.

Rabies

Rabies virus is a fatal disease that affects most species of mammals, including humans. Rabies may be carried by certain species of wildlife. It is then transmitted



through bite wounds to pets. It may cause abnormal behavior, such as severe depression or aggressive behavior, inability to eat and drink, and death. There is no cure for rabies once an animal is infected.

As a public health concern, vaccination is not only considered a Core Vaccine but also required by local government health agencies. The initial rabies vaccine is given to kittens 12 weeks or older, then a booster is given 1 year later. While there are vaccines available that last 1 year or 3 years, not all states recognize the 3 year vaccine. Your local veterinarian will advise on regulations in your state.



Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)/ Feline Leukemia Virus (Feluk)

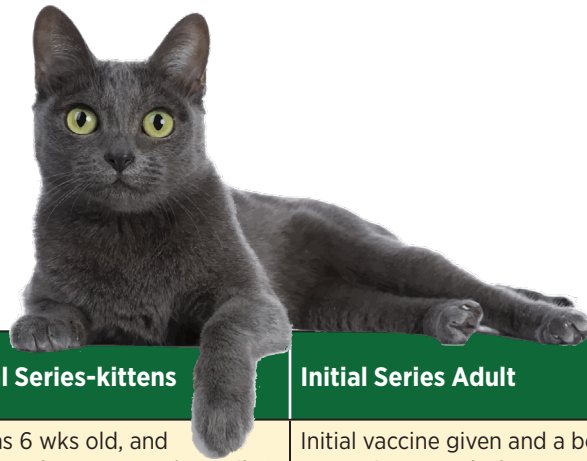
Newly acquired cats and cats that spend some or all of their time outdoors should be tested for Feline Immunodeficiency Virus and Feline Leukemia Virus. The vaccines are considered non-core, which means they may or may not be necessary depending on risk factors for individual cats. Consult with your veterinarian to determine if these vaccines are for your cat.

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus causes a weakened immune system. This causes cats to be more susceptible to infections from all other viruses, bacteria or fungus. Infected cats may appear healthy and show no symptoms for years and succumb to another disease. The primary transmission or way cats become infected is through bite wounds from infected cats. As cats, especially male cats, are territorial, fighting promotes the spread of the virus. There is no cure or treatment once a cat is infected. A vaccination is available but not effective for all cats and not considered a core vaccine. The best prevention is to avoid bite wounds. This is much easier when cats are



strictly indoors and not exposed to other cats that could potentially be infected.

Feline Leukemia may also be transmitted through bite wounds; however, it is much more contagious because it is also shed through friendly activity such as mutual grooming, sharing water or food bowls, or sharing litter boxes or from an infected mother to her kittens. Feline Leukemia Virus causes a weakened immune system and makes cats more susceptible to other infection. In addition, it is the most common cause of cancer in cats. Unlike FIV, the leukemia virus itself does cause disease; however, it may be years between infection and clinical symptoms. In the late stages of disease, cats may show progressive or reoccurring weight loss, poor appetite, fever, poor hair coat, enlarged lymph nodes, pale gums/anemia, severe inflammation of the mouth or eye conditions, respiratory infections, or other infections. Most cats will only live three years after diagnosis. While the vaccine may not be considered core for cats that are strictly indoor, it is strongly recommended for cats that will be spending any time outdoors or potentially be exposed to stray cats.



Vaccine	Initial Series-kittens	Initial Series Adult	Annual
Feline Panleukopenia, Feline Herpes Virus, Feline Calicivirus	Kittens 6 wks old, and boosted every 3-4 wks until 16 kitten is 16 wks old	Initial vaccine given and a booster vaccine 3-4 wks later	Vaccines to be given either yearly or every 3 years as recommended by your veterinarian
Rabies Virus	Kittens receive vaccine at 12 wks of age or older, followed by vaccine 12 months later	Initial vaccine given, followed by vaccine 1 yr later	Given every 1 yr or every 3 yrs depending on local regulations
Feline Leukemia Virus	Following negative test, All Kittens 9 wks or older given initial vaccine followed by booster vaccine in 3-4 wks	Following a negative test, Initial vaccine given followed by booster in 3-4 wks	Yearly for outdoor cats of cats at risk of being exposed
Feline Immunodeficiency Virus	For high risk kittens only. Following negative test, Initial vaccine followed by boosters at 3 wks and 6wks after initial	For high risk kittens only. Following negative test, Initial vaccine followed by boosters at 3 wks and 6wks after initial	For high risk cats only, annual vaccines

References

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