

FELINE VACINATIONS

PET CARE TIPS

Cats typically contract diseases through contact with other cats, although this is not always required. Some viruses can exist in the environment for extended periods and be carried into the home on your shoes or clothing. Pre-existing disease or stress can cause a lowered immune response and increase the risk of illness in your pet.

How do vaccines work?

Vaccines contain small quantities of altered or "killed" viruses, bacteria or other disease-causing organisms. When administered, they stimulate your cat's immune system to produce disease-fighting cells and proteins – or antibodies – to protect against the specific disease.

What to vaccinate against

In Australia, all adult cats require vaccination against Feline Enteritis, Feline Calicivirus & Rhinotracheitis. Protection for these is provided with a single combined injection (F3). Due to the increasing prevalence of Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) in Queensland, we recommend all cats also receive vaccination against this. A course of three initial vaccinations are required at two weekly intervals but can be given with the second & third kitten F3 vaccine.

Vaccines are also available for Feline Leukemia & Chlamydia felis though not routinely given by us. Most cases of Leukemia are found in Western Australia, not on the Eastern Coast, and Chlamydia is generally mild and easily treated. Additionally, the vaccine can make many cats sick for extended periods. If you are concerned about these diseases speak to the Veterinarian about your cats' particular circumstances.

We are fortunate that Rabies is not a problem in Australia, so unless you are travelling overseas with your pet, this vaccine will not be required

When should my cat be vaccinated?

The immunity that a kitten gains from its mother's milk begins to diminish sometime after 6 weeks of age, and their own immune system isn't fully developed until around four months. An initial course of three vaccinations is required to protect against life-threatening diseases. We do not recommend allowing your kitten to mix with unvaccinated cats until two weeks after their second vaccination.

6 – 8 Weeks First Vaccination - Feline Enteritis, Feline Calicivirus & Rhinotracheitis

10 – 12 Weeks Booster Vaccination - Feline Enteritis, Feline Calicivirus, Rhinotracheitis & first FIV injection

14 weeks – Second FIV injection

16 Weeks Final Vaccination - Feline Enteritis, Feline Calicivirus, Rhinotracheitis, and final FIV injection

Any vaccine may prove ineffective if your cat has a fever if at the time of vaccination, so the Veterinarian will always do a health check before giving the injection.

The immunity your cat gains from being vaccinated will diminish with time, so yearly vaccination is the only way to ensure continued protection against these serious and potentially fatal diseases.

Why to vaccinate

Your cat's annual vaccination visit is one of the most important things you can do to give them a long and healthy life. Pets age differently to us - one year for them is like five years for us. So, the annual check-up that is part of a vaccination visit not only allows your Veterinarian to vaccinate against the common canine diseases; they will also check the health of your pet's teeth, ears, eyes, and skin, and examine them for early signs of disease. An annual health check is strongly recommended, even if your pet is not to be vaccinated.

Some of the diseases we vaccinate against are airborne, carried by fleas, or can be brought into the home on your shoes (e.g. enteritis), so your cat doesn't need to come in direct contact with another cat, or even leave the house, to become infected.

Annual vaccinations are also required if your cat is to go to a boarding kennel.

An unvaccinated animal adds to the risk for all cats. The current rate of domestic cat vaccination in our area is below 50%. This is not high enough to provide herd immunity. We also have a high population of homeless and feral cats. This combination means when disease emerges here it will spread quickly. The only way to keep your pet safe is with regular vaccination.

Feline Enteritis

This is a viral disease also known as Feline Parvovirus, Distemper, Ataxia, Panleukopenia or cat plague. It is highly contagious and life threatening. The disease affects the blood cells in the intestines and bone marrow, causing a form of anaemia in your cat. The virus lowers a cat's immunity, making them vulnerable to other illnesses and infections. Although it is closely related to Canine Parvovirus, it cannot be passed between cats and dogs.

Feline Enteritis is usually spread from saliva or blood when cats fight, cat faeces or through fleas. It is easily transmitted via the feet of other animals and humans therefore direct contact is not required. Although recent outbreaks have only been reported in Sydney and Victoria, relocating pets can quickly spread this disease.

Clinical signs usually appear in two days and may include a high temperature, severe vomiting, diarrhoea, lack of appetite, lethargy and dehydration. In young kittens this disease is usually fatal.

As this is a virus there is no treatment to kill the disease. The intestinal lining is severely affected, which results in severe dehydration and infection in the bloodstream (septicaemia). Aggressive treatment is required at an early stage, as this disease can kill in 24 hours. As the immune system is also compromised, complications are wide ranging and common during recovery. Mortality rates are extremely high if left untreated. Cats that survive Feline Enteritis usually make a full recovery with no lasting ill effects.

Feline Calicivirus

This is a common respiratory disease, which primarily affects the lungs, nasal passages, and the mouth, and occasionally the intestines and musculoskeletal system. Symptoms include fever, loss of appetite, mouth ulcers, discharge from the eyes and nose, difficulty breathing, ulcerated paws, and inflammation of the joints and legs. It is transmitted through contact with infected cats - Shelter cats are at particularly high risk, and outbreaks have been recorded in our local area.

Calicivirus can survive in the environment for about a month, and an infected cat can continue to transmit the disease for up to four months after recovery, making containment of the virus very difficult. Unfortunately, even with treatment the virus has a 40% mortality rate; often higher in adult cats.

Being a virus, the disease must run its' course once contracted; treatment focus' on supportive care and prevention of secondary infection. Broad spectrum antibiotics, anti-emetics intravenous fluids and nutritional assistance will be used. After recovery, the cat will require isolation for many months so they won't further spread the disease - some cats remain carriers for the rest of their lives.

In 2015, a particularly virulent strain emerged and last year the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) issued a warning to Veterinarians across Queensland when cases were recorded here. This strain is easily transmitted by cats coming into contact with each other, as well as from clothing, shoes and bedding material. Current vaccinations aren't known to provide sufficient protection against this strain; avoiding direct contact with other cats is the only method of prevention. Affected cats go off their food, seem lame or sore, and some develop swollen faces and limbs and will need intensive care.

Feline Rhinotracheitis

This is also known as Feline Herpesvirus. It is one of the most common causes of upper respiratory infections in cats and is very contagious. Herpesvirus has an incubation period of two to five days and is spread through contact with infected animals. After recovery, a cat may continue to pass on the virus for several weeks, and some remain carriers for the rest of their lives.

Symptoms include coughing, sneezing, watery eyes and nose, a fever and loss of appetite. It can cause phenomena, corneal ulcers, and permanent damage to the nasal and sinus', leading to a lifetime of chronic bacterial infections. Pregnant cats or those with pre-existing disease are at higher risk of contracting Herpesvirus.

Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV)

FIV attacks your cat's immune system, leaving them vulnerable to other infections and certain types of cancer. It can be transmitted at birth but the most common method of catching this disease is through wounds while fighting. Prevalence of FIV in Australia is the highest in the world. It varies between states - Queensland currently has an infection rate of 28%. Cats with outdoor access are at the highest risk.

Like the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), FIV can be present without symptoms for many years, but results in a severely weakened immune system once the disease takes hold. Symptoms are diverse and the cat is likely to develop respiratory problems, eye disease, decreased kidney function, recurring diarrhoea and secondary infections, weight loss, cancers such as lymphoma and nervous system abnormalities. Infected cats can have a normal life expectancy with careful monitoring and preventative health care, though they must be separated from healthy cats.

Feline Leukaemia

This disease is also contracted through saliva, blood, urine and faeces, although it will only live a few hours outside of a cat. Fighting is the most common way that Leukemia is spread, and it can be transmitted by apparently healthy cats. Kittens can be born with the disease or be infected from their mothers' milk.

Indoor-only cats have a very low risk of contracting Leukemia. Cats in catteries, refuges or multi-cat households are at higher risk, especially if they share food and water dishes, and litter boxes.

Leukemia suppresses the immune system, making the cat susceptible to anaemia and other infections. Symptoms may include loss of appetite and weight loss, poor coat condition, high temperature, gum disease and ulcers in the mouth, pale or yellowish gums, runny eyes and nose, coughing, sneezing, difficulty breathing, vomiting and diarrhoea, jaundice of the eyes, infections of the bladder or skin, enlarged glands, and progressive lethargy.

The disease doesn't kill immediately – the average life expectancy is two to three years. However, they will require careful monitoring to manage the disease and prevent secondary infections. An infected cat may appear healthy but can still transmit the disease, so should not be permitted access to other cats.

Feline Chlamydia

This virus can survive in the environment for up to four weeks, it is highly contagious and direct contact is not required to transmit the disease. Young kittens, and cats in shelters and catteries are at an increased risk of contracting the disease.

Clinical signs usually appear in two to ten days. Symptoms include those of an upper respiratory disease – coughing, sneezing, runny nose and watery eyes, difficulty breathing, lack of appetite and high temperature. It is usually mild and easily treated so not routinely vaccinated against, however, if left untreated, pneumonia may develop.

Adverse Reactions

Australia has a very high level of regulation regarding the safety of vaccinations and possible side effects are considerably less of a risk than potentially exposing your pet to a serious disease. However, as vaccines stimulate your pet's immune system so a very small percentage of animals may experience a reaction such as sensitivity at the injection site, lethargy, depression or fever. These symptoms are generally mild and will pass within a day or two but should be reported to your Veterinarian so future vaccination protocols for your pet can be adjusted.

If your pet experiences any of the following more serious symptoms, take them to see the Veterinarian immediately:

- weakness
- breathing difficulties
- vomiting
- loss of appetite
- diarrhoea

We report every adverse reaction and in 25 years have only seen one or two serious reactions, though we have seen many terrible cases of preventable disease.