



Vaccination for your cat



Why have your cat vaccinated?

Vaccination is vital throughout your cat's life. Within a few weeks of being born, your kitten will start to lose the natural resistance to disease which it gained from its mother's milk and, sooner or later, it is almost certain to be exposed to infection of one kind or another through grooming, sharing litter trays or feeding bowls, fighting, or numerous other ways that are an everyday part of a cat's life.

With vaccinations you can take the essential first steps in dramatically reducing the risk of your cat becoming seriously ill or even dying from disease. With a regular annual booster after that, you can give it the protection it needs and deserves for the rest of its life.

Immunity

What is immunity?

If an animal (or person) is immune to a particular disease it means that there is little or no risk of falling ill to that disease. Immunity in an adult cat may be as a result of either regular vaccination or the cat having suffered (and survived) the disease.



What about immunity in kittens?

Provided that the mother is immune, kittens are usually protected for the first few weeks of life by the immunity passed in their mother's first milk. However, the immunity falls with time leaving the kittens susceptible to infectious diseases. Vaccinations at this point simply take over the mother's role in providing protection.

Vaccines

Modern vaccines are products of extensive research, and work by injecting a small amount of a substance that stimulates the cat's own immune system to a particular disease. These may be viral particles that have been killed or part of a virus that is able to stimulate immunity, but a vaccine is only of value if given to a healthy animal as prevention against infection. It is of very little benefit if given to an animal after exposure to an infection. These vaccines are manufactured to standards which are no less exacting than those demanded for the production of vaccines for human use. With such safe and effective vaccines readily available, it makes sense to protect your cat at the earliest opportunity.

Feline Viral Infectious Respiratory Disease

(Cat Flu)

There are two main viruses which cause what is commonly referred to as 'cat flu'. These are feline rhinotracheitis and feline calicivirus and they are present all year round in the United Kingdom cat population.

Cat flu spreads very easily by direct and indirect contact between cats. Cats entering shows or being boarded during holidays are particularly at risk because they are placed in close proximity to each other.

Signs of the disease are a runny nose, weepy eyes, sneezing, coughing and lethargy. If treated promptly, cat flu is hardly ever fatal, but can make your cat ill for some time and may leave it with snuffles and breathing difficulties for the rest of its life.

Feline Panleucopaenia

This disease, more commonly known as 'enteritis', occurs as an epidemic every few years. It is highly contagious and can affect cats of any age but is most common and severe in kittens. It causes acute depression, vomiting, diarrhoea, dehydration and in many cases death. The few cats that do survive the disease tend to suffer from other diseases due to the damage caused to the immune system.



This virus which causes feline enteritis can remain active in the environment for a very long time and spreads easily via contact with infected cats or their saliva, urine or faeces.

Feline Leukaemia

Feline leukaemia is a very serious, incurable disease which can take months or even years to fully develop and which is currently considered to be the single most significant infectious cause of death among the cat population in the western world.

Cats of any age, but particularly those up to 3 years of age, can be affected. The symptoms vary widely and range from damage to the immune system (making your cat much less able to fight off other infections) through to persistent anaemia and cancer.

Once the symptoms have appeared, your cat will almost certainly die, but even those which appear healthy can harbour the leukaemia virus and spread the infection to others when they share food or water bowls or when they suffer bites during fights. If a pregnant cat has the virus, her kittens will usually be infected when they are born.

Rabies

This disease is not seen in the UK but vaccination is compulsory for cats travelling abroad on the 'Pet Passport' or for export. Cats have to be microchipped before receiving a rabies vaccination. Please ask for more information at reception if you wish to travel with your cat.

Chlamydia

This organism causes a conjunctivitis which may be recurrent and severe. A vaccine is available but the incidence of the disease can vary greatly. Please ask your vet for more information.

Bordetella

This can also cause a runny nose and conjunctivitis. A vaccine administered by nasal drops is available. Please ask your vet for more information.

When should your cat be vaccinated?

Primary vaccination

A course of two vaccinations is given as the primary course. The initial vaccination provides a low level of immunity and 'primes' the immune system and the completion of the course with the second vaccination boosts the immunity to full protective levels.



Kittens can start their vaccination course as early as 9 weeks of age. If you acquire or have an older kitten or an older cat that has not been vaccinated or has an unknown vaccination history, please book it in for its vaccinations as soon as possible. This will also allow your new pet to have a general check up with the vet. Remember that the protective effect of vaccination is not immediate and the vet will advise you when your cat will be protected and allowed outside.

Booster vaccination

Immunity to these diseases does not last indefinitely and will gradually fall leaving your cat at risk. Annual boosters are vital to maintain the immunity which will protect your cat from these infections and provide an opportunity for a yearly health check.

Record of vaccination

On completion of your cat's primary course you will be given a record card providing a record of vaccination and advising you when the next booster is due. Catteries will almost certainly require this before accepting your cat. Remember to bring this record card to the surgery each time your cat has vaccinations so that it can be updated.

For further information please ask at reception.