

Vaccinations for Your Cat

Pet Owner Guide



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WHY DOES MY CAT NEED TO BE VACCINATED?

Vaccines help to protect against specific infectious diseases caused by some viruses and bacteria. They stimulate the body's immune system to destroy the organism and 'remember' it so that it can fight against infection again if necessary in the future. Without vaccination, many cats become seriously ill or may even die from diseases that their immune system is unable to fight effectively on its own. The use of vaccines has prevented death and disease in millions of cats. In addition, vaccines protect people from disease, such as rabies, that could be transmitted from cats.

Some diseases are easier to vaccinate against than others. For example, vaccination is very effective against feline parvovirus infection (panleukopenia) but does not completely protect against respiratory virus infections. However, cats vaccinated against respiratory tract infections generally have milder illness than if they hadn't been vaccinated and are far less likely to die from the disease.

WHY DOES MY KITTEN NEED A SERIES OF MORE THAN ONE VACCINE?

Newborn kittens depend on their mothers not just for food and warmth, but also for protection against infectious diseases. The first few times they nurse, kittens get antibodies from their mother's milk that will help to keep them safe

for a few weeks to several months. This immunity provided by "maternally derived antibodies" (MDA) is protective while a kitten's own immune system is immature. However, if the antibody levels decrease before the kitten has developed his/her own immunity, gaps in protection will occur, leaving the kitten susceptible to disease. Also while the kitten has high levels of MDA, their immune system will not respond optimally to vaccination.

Since we cannot predict for each kitten when MDA has decreased adequately to allow an effective response to vaccination, guidelines have been developed to protect as many kittens as possible against disease by giving a series of vaccinations. An incomplete series of kitten vaccinations may leave your kitten vulnerable to infection, so it is important to follow your veterinarian's recommendations and vaccinate up to at least 16 weeks of age.



HOW OFTEN DOES MY CAT NEED TO BE RE-VACCINATED?

Many things need to be taken into consideration when deciding how often your cat needs to be vaccinated. These include such things as:



- health status
- age and lifestyle of the cat
- how long a specific vaccine provides protection for ("duration of immunity")
- how likely the cat is to be exposed to the infectious agent
- how dangerous this agent might be
- licensing regulations in each country

This is why re-vaccination intervals may vary, both from cat to cat, home to home, and with different diseases. Your veterinarian will be able to customize a vaccination schedule for your individual cat.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF VACCINATIONS?

The benefits of vaccination greatly outweigh possible risks. Just as in children, following vaccination your cat may experience mild and short-lived reactions (malaise), such as poor appetite, lethargy, and fever that resolve without treatment. Any symptoms that persist for more than a day or two should be discussed with your veterinarian. Rarely, more serious allergic reactions occur and may include vomiting, diarrhea, facial swelling, or difficulty breathing. These serious reactions appear within minutes or hours of vaccination and require *immediate* veterinary care. Another uncommon reaction is a tumor at the injection site that develops months or years after vaccination. Talk to your veterinarian about any persistent lumps or swellings at injection sites.



WHAT VACCINATIONS DOES MY CAT REQUIRE?



The vaccines *your* cat needs will depend on his/her health status, age, lifestyle, and what diseases are common in your area. In some areas, rabies vaccination is required by law to protect both animals and people. If you travel with your cat, your veterinarian may advise vaccination against diseases in the areas you visit. It is important to remember that even cats living totally indoors require regular

vaccination as they may be exposed to diseases in many circumstances (such as travel or boarding, interaction with other cats, the addition of a new cat to the home and even viruses carried on your clothing). Your veterinarian is the best person to evaluate your cat's individual needs in order to discuss which vaccines are necessary and how often they should be given to provide the best protection for your cat.

**You are an important member of your cat's healthcare team.
You can be instrumental in helping with the success of
treatments and improved healthcare for your cat.**

We wish to thank Boehringer Ingelheim for sponsoring this document.
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