

## Vaccine Information for Cats

### Why does my cat need vaccines?

Vaccines help protect against disease by training the body's immune system to recognize and fight an infection. Without vaccination, many cats would become seriously ill or die from preventable diseases. Some diseases can be fully prevented with vaccines. Vaccines also protect people from diseases that could be transmitted by cats.

### Does my indoor cat really need vaccines?

Even cats living indoors require regular vaccination as they could still be exposed to diseases. This could be due to travel or boarding, visiting a veterinary clinic, a new cat joining the home, or even viruses carried into your home by people.

### Why does my kitten need so many vaccine boosters?

Kittens receive some disease protection through their mother's milk in the form of "maternal antibodies". These slowly go away over the first five months of the kitten's life, but exactly when they stop working varies between individual cats. The goal of vaccinating a kitten every month is to make sure they get a vaccine as soon as possible after these antibodies from their mother go away to minimize the amount of time that they are susceptible to disease.

### How often does my adult cat need vaccine boosters?

This depends on your cat's age, previous vaccine history, health status, and lifestyle. Boosters are generally given a year after the kitten series is completed, and then every 3 years after that. If there is a gap in your cat's vaccination history, your veterinarian may recommend additional boosters.

### What are the risks of vaccination?

It is common for pets to experience mild side effects after receiving a vaccine. These symptoms are considered normal since they mean the vaccine is working - your pet's immune system is being activated. These symptoms generally begin within a few hours of the vaccine and last for 1-2 days.

- Sensitivity and swelling at the vaccination site (usually the back leg)
- Mild fever
- Decreased appetite and activity

More serious reactions to vaccines, such as allergic reactions, can occur but are less common. Allergic reactions generally happen within minutes to hours after vaccination. These reactions can be life-threatening and are medical emergencies but are treatable.

In very rare cases, certain vaccines have been associated with tumors at the injection site in cats. The frequency of these tumors has significantly decreased over time as vaccines have become safer.

### Which vaccines does my cat need?



## **Rabies Vaccine**

Rabies is a fatal disease that can be spread from animals to people through bites. Rabies is spread by a bite from an infected animal, usually wild animals such as raccoons, bats, or skunks.

Rabies is an essential vaccine for all cats. All cats living in Ontario are required by law to be vaccinated for rabies. Kittens can be vaccinated for rabies as early as 12 weeks of age. The first adult booster is given 1 year after that. If your cat stays current on the rabies vaccination, boosters can be performed every 3 years.

## **FVRCP (Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, Panleukopenia) Vaccine**

This is a combination vaccine that protects against three serious viral infections. Calicivirus and Rhinotracheitis (also known as Feline Herpes Virus) are common feline viruses that cause upper respiratory infections in cats. This vaccine does not fully prevent a cat from getting these viruses but makes the symptoms much less severe if they do become infected. Panleukopenia, which is the feline version of parvovirus, is a very contagious and often fatal disease. The virus causes severe vomiting and diarrhea and weakens the immune system. The vaccine for panleukopenia is very effective and an adult cat who has been vaccinated is very well protected against this disease.

FVRCP is an essential vaccine for all cats. Kittens can be vaccinated as young as 6-8 weeks of age. They then receive boosters every 3-4 weeks until 20 weeks (5 months) of age. The first adult booster is given 1 year after that, and then every 3 years.

## **Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) Vaccine**

The FeLV vaccine is NOT currently offered by Toronto Humane Society Public Veterinary Services. This vaccine is recommended for kittens and for adult cats who go outdoors or live with an FeLV+ cat. We recommend visiting a private veterinary clinic to if you are interested in obtaining the FeLV vaccine for your cat.

