

Vaccinating your cat

How do vaccines work?

A vaccine is a liquid containing bacteria or viruses that is used to stimulate an immune reaction. Because the immune system has memory, it will produce a quicker and stronger response to subsequent contact with the infection being vaccinated against.

The bacteria or virus in the vaccine is killed or altered so that it stimulates an immune reaction, but does not cause disease. Killed vaccines are less likely to cause disease, but also produce a weaker immune response.

What can I vaccinate my cat against?

Core vaccines

Feline herpesvirus

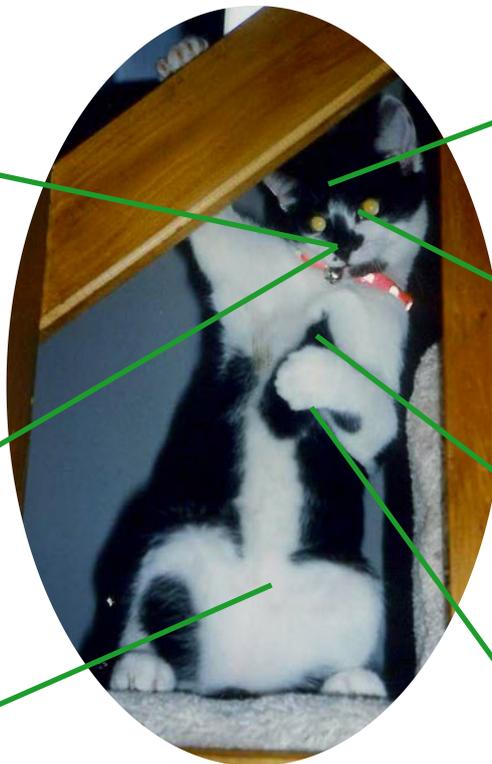
Infection causes flu like symptoms. Although the clinical signs resolve, the infection persists in the body, and recurrent episodes of disease occur, especially at times of stress. Also causes severe eye disease especially in kittens

Feline calicivirus

The second “cat flu” virus, causing sneezing and tongue ulcers. Cats may clear the infection, or become chronically infected. Several strains exist so vaccines may not provide full protection

Feline Enteritis

Related to parvo in dogs - causes severe diarrhoea, also brain disease in kittens before birth.



Non-core vaccines

Rabies

Not given routinely, however is required as part of the pet passport scheme. Vaccination every 3 years in the UK

Chlamydia

Causes conjunctivitis and cold symptoms, especially in younger cats

Bordetella

The bacteria responsible for kennel cough in dogs - not routinely given as uncommon in cats

Feline leukaemia virus

Infection of blood cells, causing anaemia, immune disease and blood cell tumours. Spread by direct cat to cat contact

What are core and non-core vaccines?

“Core” or essential vaccines are those vaccines that are advisable for any cat, no matter what the circumstances, due to the ease of spread and the seriousness of the diseases they protect against. Non-core vaccines are considered individually, based on age, life style, and contact with other cats. Non-core vaccines will be discussed during your vaccine consultation.



Do house cats need vaccinations?

Even if a cat never leaves the house, the core vaccines are recommended, as the diseases they protect against do not need direct cat-to-cat contact for spread. Feline enteritis can be carried on clothing or shoes, and the cat flu viruses can be spread through the air - for example at veterinary practices. They are also required for cats going into catteries.

The feline leukaemia virus vaccine is usually not necessary for a house cat living on its own.

When can I get my cat vaccinated?

All cats will require an initial vaccination course of two injections, given three weeks apart. Kittens can start the vaccinations from eight weeks, with the second vaccination at twelve weeks.

Current recommendations are for annual boosters. The booster consultations also provide an opportunity to discuss any healthcare issues you may have and to provide an annual health and weight check.

Immunity may last for more than twelve months, and vaccinations may be given less frequently, however this increases the risk of infection. Cats going into catteries will require annual vaccinations.

What are the risks of vaccination?

Side effects from vaccination are very rare, and are usually mild. The most common side effects are slight swelling or tenderness at the injection site, lethargy, and loss of appetite. These usually subside within twenty four hours.

The most significant and well publicised side effect is fibrosarcoma - a tumour at the vaccination site. Some vaccines are more likely to cause tumours. The incidence of fibrosarcoma in the UK has been estimated at 1 in 250,000 vaccines.

However vaccines are for the most part safe, and provide important protection against several diseases which can be expensive to treat, and potentially life threatening.

