



MANOR
VETERINARY CLINIC

Vaccinating your cat



Vaccination protects animals against highly infectious and potentially fatal diseases. As well as protecting your own pet, it also prevents spread to other animals.

The initial primary course ensures the body's immunity is primed, then regular boosters will "top up" this immunity. Ensuring that your cat has a complete course of initial vaccinations and regular booster vaccinations is important for their health.

Which diseases are vaccinated against?

Feline Panleucopaemia (Feline Infectious Enteritis) - This viral disease is particularly dangerous for kittens and young cats, where severe vomiting and diarrhoea can cause fatal dehydration within 2-3 days. It is spread in faeces and can survive a long time in the environment.

Cat 'flu (Feline viral rhinotracheitis), caused by Feline calicivirus and herpesvirus - The symptoms of cat flu are similar to human flu, where cats get sneezing, runny nose and eyes but they can also get mouth ulcers. It is rarely fatal other than in very young or old cats or those already ill with another disease however once infected cats will carry and shed the virus for a long time, posing a risk to other cats. Carrier cats may show no symptoms or they may have inflamed mouths or nasal discharge that never gets better. The protection given by vaccination may be short lived, making regular boosters essential.

Feline Leukaemia (FeLV) - This virus is spread by direct contact with other cats, so any cat that goes outside or mixes with other cats is at risk. Not all cats that are infected with the virus get the disease, but in those that do it is almost always fatal. It destroys the cat's own immune response making them susceptible to other diseases and can cause fatal cancers.

Rabies - Vaccination against rabies is non compulsory in this country unless you wish to travel with your cat under the PETS travel scheme. Boosters are usually every 3 years but may be more frequent to comply with travel regulations.

When should my cat be vaccinated?

Kittens are protected against many infectious diseases through antibodies from their mother's milk. These antibodies prevent the vaccines from working properly until they start to wear off. Most kittens will have their first vaccination at 9 weeks then the second at 12 weeks.

Why are yearly booster vaccinations necessary?

The protection given by vaccines is not life-long and wears off at different rates for particular vaccinations and in different individual animals. Some of the diseases have a low level of infection in the environment, so adult cats may not encounter the wild strain enough to boost immunity and will be susceptible if they come in to contact with it. Repeated vaccinations are required to maintain adequate antibody titres. If your cat has missed the date of their regular booster vaccination, your vet may start with a new course to make sure your cat is fully protected.

An annual consultation is also important for a veterinarian to check for any other health problems and most boarding catteries will insist on seeing proof of regular vaccinations before looking after your cat.

Do vaccines always work?

The effectiveness of vaccines can be reduced by poor storage and inappropriate administration techniques but is also determined by the health of the animal being vaccinated. For this reason your vet will perform a full history and clinical examination before vaccinating your pet. They may choose to delay vaccinating your cat until any other diseases or conditions are treated so that your pet is more likely to respond to the vaccine. Vaccination of an individual already incubating infectious disease is unlikely to be effective. The ability of an animal to mount an adequate response to vaccination can also be affected by poor nutrition, concurrent drug therapy, e.g. immunosuppressive drugs, and stress.

If your pet is suffering from another ongoing condition vaccination is important. Animals with chronic, controlled diseases such as diabetes mellitus or heart disease should receive regular vaccination.

In any population, even with the strictest attention to correct administration, a small number of individuals may fail to respond to any vaccination.

Are vaccines safe?

Sometimes your cat will seem 'off colour' for a day or two after its vaccination and the injection site may become tender and swollen. If these signs do not subside after a few days, then contact your vet. Other adverse effects, which can include swelling of the face or immune mediated diseases are very rare. There is evidence from studies in America that the use of particular vaccines can result in development of tumours at injection sites. Although these are incredibly rare, the risk does increase with the number of vaccinations. If you are at all concerned about any of these reactions then talk to your vet. Remember that the complications are extremely rare and that the risk of serious illness or death is much higher from the infectious diseases that the vaccine are protecting against.

Infectious disease may seem uncommon in cats because most cats are protected by vaccination. Your cat must receive regular vaccinations to be fully protected against these diseases.



MANOR
VETERINARY CLINIC

www.manorveterinaryclinic.co.uk



Written and illustrated by Megan Davies MA VetMB MRCVS, 2011.

Some content adapted from Vetstream felis.

Manor Veterinary Clinic, Pent Road, Shearway Business Park, Folkestone, Kent CT19 4RH
Phone: 01303 273203 | Fax: 01303 271994 | Email: office@manorveterinaryclinic.co.uk