



# EXCLUSIVELY CATS

VETERINARY HOSPITAL

“Because there’s no such thing as  
*‘just a cat!’*”

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## VACCINATIONS AND BASIC PREVENTATIVE HEALTH CARE FOR YOUR CAT OR KITTEN

### Vaccinations:

#### 1) Panleukopenia (feline distemper), rhinotracheitis, calicivirus, and chlamydia psittaci. (PCTC)

- This combination vaccine protects your cat against potentially fatal gastrointestinal (feline distemper) and respiratory diseases.
- **ALL KITTENS AND CATS SHOULD BE VACCINATED AGAINST THESE DISEASES** since their modes of transmission between cats includes;
  - a) Direct contact with a sick cat
  - b) Being in the same room with a sneezing cat who has one of the respiratory diseases.
  - c) Having contact with a non-disinfected surface (e.g. - a person's hands or clothing) that, during the past few months, has touched a cat with feline distemper.

### Vaccination Schedule:

Before 12 weeks.....1 of 3 or 4 series  
 12 weeks or older.....1 of 2 series  
 Unknown history - older cat.....1 of 2 series  
 Series are done 2 - 4 weeks apart  
 Booster yearly

(Note: Older kittens and cats with no known history of vaccinations should receive two "feline distemper/ respiratory disease" vaccines 3 to 4 weeks apart and then continue with annual boosters in order to acquire proper immunization.)

#### 2) Virulent Systemic Feline Calicivirus Disease (VS-FCV)

- Virulent systemic calicivirus (VS-FCV) previously called hemorrhagic calici, is an extremely contagious and severe form of calicivirus that first emerged a few years ago. It can be brought into your home on your clothing, and is routinely seen in cats that never go outside and have not been exposed to other cats. It is a serious disease of cats of all ages, and is often fatal. The incubation period is one to five days, but can be as long as 12 days. Signs may include a high fever, facial and limb swelling, pneumonia, bleeding ulcers on the skin, nose, ears, mouth and organ failure with jaundice. VS-FCV can kill a cat within 24 hours. Consequently, we strongly recommend that you vaccinate your cats against this highly contagious and dangerous disease.
- Calicivirus has been one of the viruses against which the routine “distemper” or PCTC, vaccine protects your cat. However, the “old” calicivirus (for which the original PCTC vaccine was developed) has mutated into a new strain, VS-FCV. In order to protect your cat against this “new” calicivirus we need to upgrade his distemper vaccine by giving him a calicivirus vaccine today and then repeating it in 2 to 4 weeks. Once the initial series has been given it will be included in his routine distemper vaccines.

- This disease can affect all cats, either by making them very sick or by causing them to be carriers. However, it is the pampered indoor cats whose immune systems have been exposed to very little disease that become the sickest and are at the most risk from dying from this disease. Consequently, we highly recommend that you allow us to include VS-FCV in your cats' vaccine program.

Vaccination Schedule:

8 weeks or older.....1 of 2 series  
Series are done 2 – 4 weeks apart.  
Booster yearly

## 2) Feline Leukemia Virus

- Feline Leukemia is a contagious viral disease that attacks a cat's immune system, increasing the susceptibility to other diseases.
- Transmission of the feline leukemia virus requires direct cat-to-cat contact, as the virus is not readily transmitted by aerosol and lasts only minutes in a dry environment. Therefore, your cat can contract feline leukemia by sharing a food bowl, water dish, or litter pan with a feline leukemia infected cat or by being groomed, "spit-at", or bitten by an infected cat. Consequently, it is recommended that that all kittens and cats that spend any time outdoors, live with a cat that may go outdoors, or live in a household that periodically acquires new cats be vaccinated against feline leukemia. (In other words, for kittens and cats that will NEVER go outdoors and will NEVER have another cat move in with or visit them, the vaccine is optional.)
- Testing for feline leukemia is generally recommended for all new cats; however, it is strongly recommended that unvaccinated cats be tested:
  - a) Prior to routine surgeries (since the veterinarian will want to take special precautions if the cat is feline leukemia positive.)
  - b) Prior to starting the initial feline leukemia vaccination series
  - c) Upon presentation to a veterinarian for a debilitating disease or for any medical problem that your veterinarian feels is not resolving as normally expected.

Vaccination Schedule: (preceded by a blood test)

10 weeks of age or older.....1 of 2 series  
Series are 2 - 4 weeks apart  
Booster yearly

## 3) Rabies

- Rabies is a viral infection that causes severe behavioral and neurological changes (and almost always death) in the infected animal.
- It is transmitted predominantly by a bite from (or other contact with the saliva of ) an infected animal. Animals most likely to be infected are bats, raccoons, foxes, skunks, dogs, and cats. (Horses, domestic livestock, opossums, weasels and other wild carnivores have a "moderate" incidence of infection, while the incidence among rodents and rabbits is extremely low.)
- Due to the recent cases of rabies in northern New Jersey and in the Delaware Valley, it is **strongly recommended that ALL CATS OVER THE AGE OF 3 MONTHS be vaccinated against rabies.**

**Vaccination Schedule:**

3 to 6 months of age.....first rabies vaccine  
One year later.....second rabies vaccine  
Three years later.....start triennial boosters

**NJ recommendation - booster every 2 years**

4) **Feline AIDS (FIV)**

- Feline AIDS is caused by infection with Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV). FIV causes a potentially fatal viral disease that interferes with the immune system of a cat. The virus lives in the blood of the infected cat and is carried in their system throughout their life. There is no treatment or cure. Eventually, the immune system becomes too weak to fight off other infections or diseases resulting in death. Although rare, it is possible for a mother to pass the infection on to her unborn fetus.
- FIV is transmitted primarily through bite wounds, as the virus is shed in high levels through saliva. Outdoor cats are at higher risk for contracting the disease. Therefore, to reduce the risk of transmission it is recommended to limit exposure of indoor cats to outdoor cats, use caution when introducing a new cat to a multi-cat household, have the new cat tested prior to joining the household and isolate an aggressive cat from other cats.
- Testing for Feline Aids is required prior to vaccinating.

**Vaccination Schedule**

8 weeks and up.....1 of 3 series  
Series are done 2 - 3 weeks apart  
Booster yearly

5) **FIP (Feline Infectious Peritonitis)**

- FIP develops when a usually harmless strain of feline corona virus mutates in the cat in a way that gives the virus the ability to reproduce itself in some of the cat's white cells (infection-fighting cells). As the immune system attempts to mount a defense against the invaded white cells it's own protective cells and tissues become damaged. The result is an intense inflammatory reaction which eventually causes damage to multiple systems at once and ultimately leads to death.
- FIP is transmitted through the saliva and feces of infected cats. Cats in multiple cat environments are at much higher risk for FIP infection than single cat households as they are more likely to be exposed to saliva and feces of infected cats. FIP usually develops in two forms "wet" or "dry". Cats that develop the "wet" form usually die within a few days or perhaps weeks.
- Unfortunately, there is no cure for FIP, but the vaccine has been shown in some studies to protect between 50 to 75 percent of vaccinated cats.

**Vaccination Schedule**

Start at 16 weeks and up.....1 of 2 series  
Series are done 2 - 4 weeks apart  
Booster yearly

## Feline Leukemia and Feline AIDS (“combo”) Testing

This is a screening blood test for these diseases that requires the draw of only a few drops of blood from your cat or kitten and can usually be done “as you wait” at your veterinarian's office.

Reasons to have your cat screened for these deadly diseases include:

1. There are relatively inexpensive medications now that, if started before signs of “illness” occur, can be given to an infected cat to help fight off the effects of the virus. These medications are helping cats live a “healthy” life for months to years longer than they would without the medications. *Consequently, it is highly recommended that when you first adopt your cat, you have her tested for both feline leukemia and feline aids.*
2. Feline leukemia and feline aids vaccines at best are only 93% protective against the virus. (Feline leukemia vaccines are made by several different manufacturers and vary between 40% and 93% protective.) *Consequently, if you already have cats living in your home, even if they are vaccinated against these viruses, it is highly recommended that you have all “new” feline additions to your household feline leukemia and feline aids tested BEFORE they have any contact with your current cats.* If you bring the newcomer cat into your home before having her tested, make sure to not only keep the cats separated, but also do not let them eat or drink from the same bowls or use the same litter box, bedding, or toys.
3. Non-vaccinated kittens and cats that have any outdoor, “through-the-screen” outdoor, or multi-cat contact between 3½ months of age and being spayed or neutered should be tested (or re-tested) just prior to having the surgery done. The reason for this is that mating and the “play mating” that kittens do as they are approaching puberty both involve behaviors that have a high risk of resulting in the transmission of the feline leukemia and/or feline aids viruses.
4. Bad gingivitis or dental disease. A primary clinical sign of feline aids is severe gingivitis or other oral (“mouth”) problems. Feline leukemia can suppress the immune system so that your cat is unable to fight off even the simplest bacterial infections in the mouth.
5. Poorly responsive to medication given for head colds or other infections.
6. Cats who frequently get into fights should be feline leukemia and feline aids tested every 6 to 12 months, depending upon their frequency of fighting and their vaccination status.
7. Any non-vaccinated outdoor cat or “lives-with-an-outdoor-cat” cat that is showing any symptoms of illness should be tested as soon as possible for feline leukemia and feline aids. These viruses, by suppressing or altering the immune system, make it easier for other viruses, fungal infections, parasites, and even tumor cells to invade the cat's body. Knowing whether or not feline leukemia and feline aids are factors in your cat's illness makes a big difference in the approach that your veterinarian will take in trying to treat your cat.
8. Due to the “less than 100%” efficiency of vaccines and the highly contagious nature of the feline leukemia virus, it is a good idea to double check the feline leukemia and feline aids status of any sick cat, even vaccinated and “totally indoor cats”. In fact, depending upon the disease that your veterinarian has diagnosed or suspects, it may be highly recommended to test for these viruses.

## "WORMS"

Intestinal parasites, or "worms", when not detected and eliminated during their early stages of infestations, can cause severe vomiting or diarrhea, debilitation, and possible death in small kittens and mild to severe diarrhea and emaciation in adult cats. Consequently, it is very important that every kitten be checked at least twice annually and every adult cat be checked at least once annually for intestinal parasites. (Since some "worms" are carried by insects or on the shoes of the owner, this recommendation applies to indoor, as well as outdoor cats.)

To have your cat checked for worms, bring in a fresh, small ( $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon) sample of your cat's stool (bowel movement). The veterinary technician will run a laboratory test on the stool sample in order to determine if the stool contains any microscopic worm eggs. If any are detected, your veterinarian will either administer or dispense the proper medication to get rid of that type of intestinal parasite.

*(Note: Tapeworms are unfortunately not detected by the above test, but rather are only detected by seeing small "rice-like" segments of the worm in the cat's stool or around the cat's anus. Consequently, if you notice any of these segments in your cat's peri-anal fur or in his stool, call your veterinarian so that the proper medicine can be dispensed.)*

## Feeding Your Cat or Kitten

A "good" cat or kitten diet should consist of nutritionally complete commercial cat or kitten foods, with only limited (less than 10% of the total diet) "gourmet" cat foods, cat treats, and table scraps. Commercial diets highly touted to cat owners, but not labeled as either meeting NRC requirements or being "nutritionally complete", should be regarded with caution. Avoid "gravy" type foods and diets containing "greens", fruits, vegetables and miscellaneous "grains". (Unlike us, your cat's body has little use for "plant originated" nutrients.)

Recommendations for approximate amounts of food for "average" cats are suggested on the containers of commercial foods. Adjustments should be made "to effect" in accordance with age, activity, and genetic constitution of the individual cat. (Some cats, like some humans, are naturally lean or "big".)

Feeding schedules can vary between cats depending upon the nature of the individual cat and your own lifestyle. Most adult cats do well on twice daily feedings of at least half of a 5 to 6 ounce "non-gravy" can of cat food (per cat) with "free-choice" dry food for "between meal nibbling". (For obese cats, a measured amount of a weight control dry cat food is recommended so that the "free choice" part of their diet has fewer calories in it.)

Canned cat foods are considered to be "less fattening" and better for growth and development and for overall disease prevention than the same cat food in its dry form. This is because, in general, canned cat foods tend to be higher in protein, fat, and water than dry foods, and dry foods tend to be higher in carbohydrates than canned foods. Cats, unlike people and dogs, are obligate carnivores. This means that they must eat animal (including fish) protein and fat in order to live. Nutrients that come from plants, such as carbohydrates and plant sources of protein and fat are extremely hard, if not impossible, for the cat's body to digest. Therefore, these nutrients, either pass through your cat's body as "empty calories" or are stored as fat. (Animal fat in a cat's body, ironically, is metabolized into energy, which is why your cat's diet is required to have a much larger fat content than is yours. Lucky cat!)

Very young kittens (5 to 10 weeks of age) prefer to be fed small amounts of canned kitten food on a four to six times daily or "free-choice" basis. (Their stomachs are small and their calorie needs are big, so they need to eat small amounts frequently!) Once they reach 10 to 12 weeks of age, you will find that they are eating larger quantities of canned cat food per feeding and, therefore, only need to eat three to four times per day. Kittens vary as to the "right age" to start eating dry food, but fortunately most do a good job of self regulation. Consequently, once your kitten reaches 8 weeks of age and you've decided that you would like to try him on dry food, periodically offer him some dry kitten food to see if he is interested in eating food with a "hard" texture. Your kitten will start to eat dry food when he is ready to do so.

As your kitten becomes older (e.g., 4 to 6 months of age), you can slowly switch over to the "adult cat" feeding schedule discussed above; however, feed your kitten a "nutritionally complete" KITTEN diet until he is 7 to 9 months of age (if female) or 10 to 12 months (if male). While your kitten is growing he needs the extra proteins, fats, and minerals contained in commercial kitten diets that are not contained in the "maintenance-" or "weight control"- type diets that he will be eating as an adult cat. (Note: male kittens are in their growth phase longer than females). Similarly, because it hinders their physical and mental development, kittens should not be fed any "gravy" diets, tuna (of any type), table foods, and commercial cat treats. (This is extremely important during the kitten's "rapid growth" phase, or first 6 months of life!)

Beverage: contrary to old wives tales, cats and kittens do not require milk in their diet. (In fact, milk frequently causes either diarrhea or constipation in cats and is thought to contribute to urinary blockage problems in male cats and to diabetes and "bladder stones" in middle age" cats.) Cats and kittens do, however, need a palatable source of fresh drinking water available at all times.

### **Spaying**

It is strongly recommended that your female cat be "spayed" at approximately five to six months of age or before she goes into her first heat period. Unspayed female cats not mated and cycling repeatedly are predisposed to potentially fatal uterine infections and to tumors of the ovaries, uterus, and mammary glands.

Also, although "everyone loves a kitten", the bottom line is that pet owners find it quite hard, if not impossible, to find homes for all the kittens that their cat may present to them. Even the best of intentions to keep an indoor female cat away from roaming toms is often foiled as the female in heat is driven hormonally to do anything it has to do to get outside to a male cat and mate. From an animal lovers perspective, it is downright criminal to not take full responsibility for all the kittens to which your cat gives birth! Female cats can mate while lactating and often have three to five litters per year. Consequently, it does not take long for one unspayed feline "responsibility" to become "dozens" of the same!

The operation is an ovariohysterectomy. It is major surgery where general anesthesia and pre-surgery pain medications are used. After the cat is anesthetized and prepared for surgery, a two to three inch incision in the abdomen is made and the uterus and ovaries are removed. The incision is then closed with three to four layers of sutures. Your cat will be fully recovered from the anesthesia when she is sent home; however, she may be a bit sedated and "wobbly" from the pain medication. Because the most important things that your cat needs after a spay is quiet, familiar surroundings and "tender loving care", we will send your cat home the evening of the spay and recommend that you keep her, for the next few days, in a part of your home that is quiet, low traffic and near her food, water, and litter box. Some cats are a little quiet and don't want to engage in much activity for several days to a week after the surgery, while others will be ready to resume their normal activities within a couple of days. (You will be asked to try to limit your cat's activity until you return to have the skin sutures removed and the incision checked, approximately 10 to 12 days after she is spayed.)

### **Neutering:**

Like the female, male cats should be neutered at approximately five to six months of age or before they show the first signs of urine spraying.

The benefits for neutering a male kitten before it reaches sexual maturity include:

- a) Reduction of the urge to roam and to fight with other cats (thereby increasing his lifespan).
- b) Elimination of the "tom-cat" odor from the urine.
- c) Prevention of the habit of spraying urine on walls and inanimate objects.

Neutering a male cat later in life will have many of the same benefits, but by then the roaming, fighting, and spraying will be practiced behaviors and probably will be only reduced rather than eliminated.

Also, since it "takes two" to mate, owners of unneutered males share the responsibility with owners of unsprayed female cats for the thousands of kittens abandoned to the streets, woodlands, and humane societies each year.

The operation is a relatively simple one, involving a general anesthetic and pain medication. A very small incision is made in each scrotal sac, and the testes are removed. No sutures are required. Your cat will be allowed to go home the evening of the surgery, but we strongly recommend that you keep him quiet that first night in a low traffic room near his food, water, and litter box. He will be sent home fully recovered from the anesthesia, but he may be slightly sedated and wobbly from the pain medication when he gets home. Most male cats are back to their normal activity within a day or two of being neutered. Due to the location of the incisions, an "incision-safe" cat litter will be dispensed for you to use in your cat's litter box (instead of his regular litter) for one week after the surgery.

If your cat has already started to show signs of sexual maturity prior to the neuter, it will take about three to eight weeks before he eliminates or reduces his "spraying" behavior, his urine has less of a "tomcat" odor, and he begins to stay closer to home. If your cat had started urine spraying for weeks prior to the neuter it may have become a "learned behavior" in addition to a "hormonally driven" one. Consequently, if his urine spraying shows no sign of improving during the first month after the neuter, call Exclusively Cats to discuss steps to minimize or stop the spraying.

### **Declawing**

You can have your kitten declawed anytime after four months of age. Most declaws are done when the kitten is spayed or neutered at five to six months of age. It is strongly recommended that you have your cat declawed as young as possible (i.e. -- less than one year of age) as declawing can be temporarily traumatic to the older cat.

The decision of whether or not to have your cat declawed is a totally personal one, but should only be done if your cat is to be a totally indoor cat the rest of his life. Many people find that they enjoy their indoor cat much more if they do not have to worry about the cat's natural instinct to sharpen his claws resulting in the destruction of furniture, wallpaper, clothing, etc. Options to ease this tension between feline and human include training your cat to use heavy-duty scratching posts strategically placed around your home and having your cat front declawed.

The declaw surgery is performed under general anesthesia and with the use of pain medication and antibiotics. It involves removal of the claw-containing end segment of each front digit by incising the ligamentous attachments between the segments. (No bones are cut. No weight-bearing part of the toe is removed.) The resulting  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch incision in the skin at the end of each toe is closed with surgical glue, and the cat's feet are placed in soft padded bandages. Your cat is kept in the hospital for two additional days following the day of surgery. This is done because most young cats want to be active after their anesthesia has worn off and excessive walking, jumping, etc. will cause bleeding through the bandages and slow the healing process. Roughly 24 hours after the surgery, the bandages are removed and your cat spends the rest of the day "hanging out" quietly in a softly padded cage, as his healing process is monitored. At home care for the first week after the surgery involves:

- a) Removing your cat's regular litter from his litter box and using an "incision safe" cat litter, which may be purchased at the time your cat goes home.
- b) Minimizing the amount of running and jumping done at home. These steps are necessary to prevent injury and infection to the healing toes.

After the incisions are completely healed, about one to three weeks after the declaw surgery (depending upon age and post-surgery activity) your indoor cat's lifestyle goes pretty much back to normal.