



28966 Information Lane
Easton, Maryland 21601
(410) 822-8505 (410) 820-8328

Vaccine Protocol for Cats

At Veterinary Medical Center, we follow the vaccine guidelines developed by the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP). The AAFP recommends all cats be vaccinated against the core diseases of rabies and distemper (Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, and Panleukopenia). Feline leukemia vaccine is recommended for all kittens (due to their increased susceptibility of infection) and for at-risk cats (cats that go outside unattended, and cats that are exposed to Feline Leukemia positive and untested cats).

Rabies Vaccine

Rabies virus is a fatal infection typically transmitted through bite wounds, open cuts in the skin or onto mucous membranes from the saliva of the infected animal. There is no treatment available once your cat is infected with rabies. This virus has very real and serious human and pet implications. For more information about rabies, visit this link: <https://catfriendly.com/feline-diseases/rabies/>

Note: All cats, including indoor cats, are required by Maryland state law to be vaccinated against rabies. Consider the following:

- There is a small, but real potential for rabies to enter your household. Wildlife such as bats, raccoons or skunks may bring the virus into your house and expose your cat to rabies.
- There is a legal liability should an unvaccinated cat bite or scratch a person. Rabies is a fatal disease for both humans and pets and is found here on the Delmarva Peninsula.

FVRCP (Distemper) Vaccine

The feline FVRCP vaccine is used to protect cats against the three highly contagious viruses: feline herpesvirus, feline calicivirus and feline panleukopenia. The initial kitten series includes vaccine administration every 3-4 weeks with the last vaccine administered after 16 weeks of age. The vaccine is administered again at 1 year of age and then every 3 years.

This vaccine protects against:

Feline Herpesvirus (Feline Rhinotracheitis): Clinical signs are associated with upper respiratory infection such as sneezing and discharge from the eyes and/or nose. This virus can become latent (inactive) in some cats. These “carrier” cats may have long-term infections that reactivate in times of stress or with treatment that suppresses the immune system.

Feline Calicivirus: Clinical signs include sneezing, eye discharge, nasal discharge, oral ulcers, anorexia, and joint pain (lameness or stiffness.)

Feline Panleukopenia (Feline Distemper Virus) – For more information about panleukopenia, visit this link: <https://www.avma.org/public/PetCare/pages/Feline-Panleukopenia.aspx>. This virus most commonly attacks the intestine, bone marrow, and brain and can cause severe disease, including death. Symptoms are most severe in kittens. Clinical signs may include severe diarrhea, vomiting, dehydration, fever, lethargy and anorexia. The immune system is often compromised, resulting in secondary infections. This virus is very resistant in the environment and may survive for over a year.

FeLV (Feline Leukemia) Vaccine

After the initial kitten series (2 vaccinations 3-4 weeks apart), it is recommended to booster cats again at 1 year of age, then yearly depending on the risk of exposure to the virus. A FeLV blood test should be performed prior to vaccination.

Feline leukemia is a significant cause of illness and death in cats. The feline leukemia virus is spread through grooming, sharing food or water dishes, or biting. Survival time for cats infected with FeLV ranges from 6 months to 3 years after infection. Clinical signs associated with a viral infection are not specific and may include immune-mediated diseases, tumors, bone marrow disorders including anemia, and secondary infections. For more information on the feline leukemia virus, visit this link: <https://catfriendly.com/feline-diseases/felv/>

Vaccine reactions in cats

Vaccine associated sarcomas are rare in cats, and any vaccination or injection poses a risk. For more information on this, visit this link: <https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Reference/Pages/rbbroch.aspx>



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Parasites of cats

Cats are exposed to both internal and external parasites because of their predatory behavior and grooming habits. Visit this link for more information on cat parasitism: <https://catfriendly.com/keep-your-cat-healthy/parasite-prevention/>

Heartworm disease in cats is rare, however infection with this parasite can cause serious disease. Cats are not the primary host for heartworms, so adult heartworms may not develop. Most infected cats are asymptomatic, or may develop non-specific symptoms like intermittent vomiting unassociated with eating, or intermittent cough related to asthma type disease. Rarely, cats may present with the severe disease: Heartworm Associated Respiratory Disease (HARD), which is associated with the death of developing juvenile worms. Cats may present with cough, wheezing, and difficulty breathing. If adult worms are present, their death can potentiate HARD signs. Sudden death can occur and is thought to result from a condition similar to acute respiratory distress syndrome in people. For more information about Heartworm disease visit this link: <https://catfriendly.com/keep-your-cat-healthy/parasite-prevention/heartworm/>

Intestinal parasites: Cats are prone to intestinal parasitism, with prevalence rates as high as 45 percent; even for indoor cats. These infections may come from other cats, eating raw meat, or ingesting bird/rodent prey. With their fastidious grooming habits, it is easy to ingest a parasite egg or cyst off the fur while licking/grooming. Most cats with infections may have no clinical symptoms and normal stools. Other signs are nonspecific, and may include a dull haircoat, cough, gastro-intestinal upset, poor appetite, or a pot-bellied appearance. Some of these parasites have the potential of infecting humans such as hookworms and roundworms. Common external parasites include fleas, ticks, skin mites, and ear mites. Both indoor and outdoor cats are at risk. In cats, prevention of both heartworm and intestinal parasite infections are done by limiting exposure to vectors spreading the disease, by keeping your cats inside, as well as monthly medication to kill the parasites. We recommend topical Revolution Plus monthly. This medication kills immature heartworm larva, intestinal parasites (roundworms, hookworms, tapeworms) and external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and ear mites. Monthly oral Heartgard for cats is also effective to treat internal parasites, but not external parasites.