

# Factsheet 2 - Vaccination:Cats



Vaccinations are injections that are used to prevent or limit certain diseases in cats. In general they protect against those infections that cannot be cured easily or are particularly unpleasant. Most commonly they act against viruses as there are no reliable drugs available against these.

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## DISEASES PROTECTED BY VACCINATION

### **Cat 'Flu (Rhinotracheitis)**

There are a number of different micro-organisms that can cause this condition. Most are viruses. All produce a profound runny nose and watery eyes and some can also affect the mouth and lungs.

The vaccine protects against a herpes virus and a calici virus. The former can be fatal, while the latter rarely is, but can lead to life-long respiratory and mouth problems. Both can be passed from the mother before birth, and in such cases the kittens can have recurrent bouts of illness that are difficult to eliminate.

Cat 'flu is a very unpleasant disease for the patient. The worst cases have to be hospitalised for intensive care and intravenous fluids. The cat cannot eat and breathing is difficult which makes them very distressed.

### **Feline Enteritis**

There is a viral form of enteritis (diarrhoea) , related to Parvovirus in dogs, which is almost invariably fatal. It was thought to have become rare, but in the last few years there have been a few cases.

### **Feline Leukaemia Virus**

This is not uncommon in this area. It is a virus very similar to HIV which leads to AIDS in humans, and once caught there is a gradual destruction of the immune system in much the same way. Fortunately some cats can recover, but

about 2/3rds of cats do not, and go on to develop tumours or leukaemia, hence the name.

The virus is passed on in fights, by bites and saliva, so any cat that meets other cats is at risk. Alarmingly a recent survey showed that 1:20 stray tomcats had the virus. It is also passed on from the mother and through saliva during grooming.

Vaccination against this particular disease is therefore strongly recommended. The dose does not actually contain any virus, just a synthetic protein that induces the correct immunity. There is therefore no risk from vaccination.

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Immunity from vaccines wanes with time and becomes unreliable after twelve months. Therefore annual booster vaccination is important. If your cat is being placed in a cattery more than ten months after the last dose of vaccine then it may be wise to bring the booster forward so that they have maximum protection when they are most at risk.

Kittens only have temporary protection from their mothers which disappears by about 9-12 weeks. They need two doses of each vaccine: The first 'primes' the body; the second produces the desired immunity.

We recommend 'Leucoteligen' vaccine at 9 and 12 weeks which is the most comprehensive all-in-one vaccination available for cats.

\*Note: FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus) is another potentially fatal disease that cats can catch from fighting with other cats. To date there is no vaccine available, and the best defence is to neuter tomcats before they start territorial fighting, since most cases seen are in un-castrated males.