

# Feline Vaccination Guidelines

**Core Vaccines**-Core vaccines are those that are recommended for all cats. Non-Core vaccines should be administered only to cats on an individual bases after assessment of their lifestyle and risk by your veterinarian.

- **Rabies (Required on all HSHV patients old enough/well enough to receive)** - Rabies is a fatal viral disease that can infect all warm-blooded animals, including cats and humans. It affects the central nervous system, and often first reveals itself through significant changes in a cat's behavior, including sudden restlessness, aggression and fear.
  - In most cases, disease is transmitted through a bite wound from an infected animal. The most common wildlife species to spread rabies to domestic animals and humans in North America are the skunk, bat, raccoon, fox, and coyote. It should be noted that wildlife, bats especially, are able to gain access to indoor areas and potentially infect pets and people.
  - Vaccination is given as a single dose beginning between 12-16 weeks of age. Once an animal has received an initial one year rabies vaccination, they should receive the vaccine every 1 to 3 years for life depending on the product used.
- **Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis (herpesvirus) – Calicivirus – Panleukopenia (FVRCP - Commonly referred to as the feline “Distemper” vaccine) (Required for all HSHV surgical patients)**
  - **Rhinotracheitis** (FVR) and **Calicivirus** (FCV) are responsible for roughly 90% of upper respiratory infections in cats. They are spread by contaminated litter boxes and water bowls, or through contact with infected fluids such as saliva, nasal secretions, and eye discharge.
    - FVR is characterized by sneezing, runny nose, irritated eyes, and coughing. These infections are permanent and recurring. Stressful events commonly induce a viral flare up. These episodes may recur for the life of the cat. A cat with herpes is contagious to other cats for a couple of weeks after a stressful event.
    - FCV typically presents with a runny nose and moderate sneezing, but the presence of other viruses and bacteria can increase its severity. Cats infected with FCV may shed virus continuously, not just in times of stress, and may do so for life. Cats infected with FCV are contagious for several months after infection but do not appear to have recurrences the same way cats with FVR do.
  - **Panleukopenia** is a highly contagious parvovirus that can be fatal to the affected cat.
    - Typical signs include sudden onset of fever, loss of appetite, dehydration, vomiting, diarrhea, hypothermia, and death. Cats become infected through contact with an infected animal's bodily fluids and feces.
  - Vaccination is highly recommended for all cats beginning as early as 6 weeks of age followed by a booster every 3-4 weeks until 16-20 weeks of age. For cats over sixteen weeks of age with unknown or no previous vaccination history, an initial vaccination plus a follow-up booster 3-4 weeks later is strongly recommended to ensure adequate protection from these diseases. A booster is due one year after the initial series. And thereafter every 3 years for life.

## Non-Core Vaccines: Based on lifestyle.

- **Feline Leukemia Virus** Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) is the cause of more cat deaths than any other organism and is widespread in the cat population.
  - It is especially dangerous to young cats. It causes cancer (lymphoma) in about 25% of infected cats, as well as contributing to other infectious diseases by suppressing the immune system and bone marrow production. 85% of cats with FeLV infection die within 3 years of the diagnosis. It is transmitted through contact with infected saliva, blood, and from mother to fetuses (developing kittens) during pregnancy.
  - Vaccination is recommended for cats at risk of exposure (i.e. those who go outdoors or are living with an infected or potentially infected cat). Prior to vaccination, the cat must be tested for the virus. Due to the incubation of the disease, if you don't know the history of your cat because it was a stray or recently acquired or if it has only been tested once, it is strongly recommended that you retest a minimum of 28 days after the initial test to verify results. Vaccination can be administered as early as 8 weeks of age with a second booster 3-4 weeks later for an initial series. A single booster should be administered 1 year after the initial two-dose series and every 1-3 years thereafter dependent on age and risk factor.

## Vaccination Reactions

While the benefits of vaccination in most cases outweigh the risks, and feline vaccines have a high safety record, administration of vaccinations can never be entirely risk free. Side effects are commonly mild and self-limiting, including fever, lethargy and discomfort or mild swelling at the injection site. More severe reactions include vomiting, trouble breathing, facial swelling, collapse, anaphylaxis, loss of appetite for two or more days and development of injection site sarcoma (a cancerous tumor).

**If any of these occur or you suspect your cat may be having an adverse reaction to a vaccine, contact our clinic immediately at 734-662-4365 if it is during business hours. If this occurs after hours, seek emergency medical care for your cat as soon as possible.**