

# Vaccinations for Your Cat



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## WHY DOES MY CAT NEED TO BE VACCINATED?

Vaccines help to protect against specific infectious diseases caused by some viruses and bacteria. They stimulate the body's immune system to detect infection and help the body fight against infection if necessary in the future. Without vaccination, many cats will become seriously ill or may even die from diseases that their immune system is unable to fight effectively on its own. The use of vaccines has prevented death and disease in millions of cats and it is important to continue this practice to ensure cats are protected throughout their lives. In addition, vaccines protect people from disease, such as rabies, that can be transmitted from cats.

A discussion about vaccination needs and your cat's individual risk is a part of their routine check-up with their veterinarian.

## WHY DOES MY KITTEN NEED A SERIES OF MORE THAN ONE VACCINE?



Newborn kittens depend on their mothers for food and warmth, but also for protection against infectious diseases. The first few times they nurse, kittens get antibodies from their mother's milk that will help to keep them safe for a few weeks to several months. This immunity provides protection with "maternally derived antibodies" (MDA) while a kitten's own immune system is still developing. However, if the antibody levels decrease before the kitten has developed his/her own immunity, they may not be protected which could leave the kitten susceptible to disease. During the time when the kitten has high levels of MDA, it can interfere with their immune system's ability to fully respond to vaccination.

The rate at which MDA declines is different for every kitten. Since we cannot predict for each kitten when MDA has become low enough to allow an effective response to vaccination, guidelines have been developed to protect as many kittens as possible against disease by giving a series of vaccinations starting at 4 weeks of age. An incomplete series of kitten vaccinations may leave your kitten vulnerable to infection, so it is important to follow your veterinarian's recommendations and vaccinate up to at least 16-18 weeks of age with boosters at 6 months and 12 months of age, depending on the vaccine.

## HOW OFTEN DOES MY CAT NEED TO BE RE-VACCINATED?

Many things need to be taken into consideration when deciding how often your cat needs to be vaccinated. These include such factors as:



- Health status
- Your cat's age and lifestyle
- How long a specific vaccine provides protection for ("duration of immunity")
- How likely your cat is to be exposed to a specific disease
- How dangerous a disease might be
- Licensing regulations in the area where you live or travel

This is why re-vaccination intervals may vary from cat to cat, home to home, and between different diseases. Your veterinarian will be able to customize a vaccination schedule for your individual cat.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF VACCINATIONS?

The benefits of vaccination greatly outweigh possible risks. Just as in children, following vaccination your cat may experience mild and short-lived reactions (malaise), such as poor appetite, lethargy, and fever that resolve without treatment. Any symptoms that persist for more than a day or two should be discussed with your veterinarian. Rarely, more serious allergic reactions occur and may include vomiting, diarrhea, facial swelling, or difficulty breathing. These serious reactions appear within minutes or hours of vaccination and require immediate veterinary care. Another uncommon reaction is a tumor at the injection site that develops months or years after vaccination. Talk to your veterinarian about any persistent lumps or swellings at injection sites.



## WHAT VACCINATIONS DOES MY CAT REQUIRE?



The vaccines your cat needs will depend on his/her health status, age, lifestyle, and what diseases are common in your area. In some areas, rabies vaccination is required by law to protect both animals and people. If you travel with your cat, your veterinarian may advise vaccination against diseases in the areas you visit. It is important to remember that even cats living totally indoors require regular

vaccination as they may be exposed to diseases in many circumstances (such as travel or boarding, interaction with other cats, the addition of a new cat to the home, and even viruses carried on your clothing). Some diseases are easier to vaccinate against than others. For example, vaccination is very effective against feline parvovirus infection (panleukopenia) but does not completely protect against respiratory virus infections. However, cats vaccinated against respiratory tract infections generally have milder illness than if they hadn't been vaccinated and are far less likely to die from the disease. Your veterinarian is the best person to evaluate your cat's individual needs in order to discuss which vaccines are necessary and how often they should be given to provide the best protection for your cat.

For more information on vaccinations for your cat,  
visit [catfriendly.com/vaccines](https://catfriendly.com/vaccines)

**You are an important member of your cat's healthcare team.  
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