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# Newsletter - Feline Distemper

***Dear Pet Owner,***

***In this newsletter we'll explain what exactly a distemper vaccine is and what diseases it protects your cat against. We recommend all cats; even strictly indoor cats receive a distemper vaccine (FVRCP) one every 3 years for adult cats. Initial vaccines for kittens are started at 8 weeks of age, and given every 3-4 weeks until they're 16 weeks old with the last vaccine being good for 3 years. In this newsletter, we will explain what exactly a distemper vaccine is and what diseases it protects your cat against.***

## FVRCP (Feline Distemper)

**F is for feline and V is for viral (virus).**

**R is for Rhinotracheitis** - which is also called feline herpes virus infection. (FHV-1). This virus affects domestic and wild cats worldwide. Rhinotracheitis is characterized by a variety of respiratory symptoms, including sneezing, nasal discharge, rhinitis (inflammation of the nose), and conjunctivitis (inflammation of the membrane lining the eyelid).

Rhinotracheitis is part of the feline upper respiratory infection (URI) complex, a group of viral and bacterial infections (e.g., calicivirus, chlamydiosis) that cause sneezing and discharge from the eyes and nose. FHV-1 is one of the most common.

**Incidence:** FHV-1 occurs worldwide. Cats of all ages and breeds are susceptible, though it is more common among the following.

Kittens, especially kittens born to infected mothers, multi-cat households, catteries, and pet adoption shelters, especially those with: overcrowding, physical or psychological stressors (e.g., introduction of a new pet), poor nutrition, poor sanitation, poor ventilation, cats with weakened immune system and **unvaccinated cats.**

**Transmission:** FHV-1 is shed through an infected cats eyes, nose and mouth. Any contact with these secretions is a potential mode of transmission. The most common mode of transmission is to be contact with contaminated objects that an infected cat has touched or sneezed on. These include cages, food, water bowls, litter trays, pet owner's clothing, and the pet owner's hands. Sneezing and coughing can spread the virus as far as 4 feet.

Many cats infected with FHV-1 never completely get rid of the virus. These cats are known as latent carriers. Even though they may not show symptoms, they harbor the virus in nerve cells. Latent carriers spread infection and are a major source of new infections.

**C is for Calicivirus:** Calicivirus affects the upper respiratory system, the eyes, throat, nasal cavity and oral cavity it will occasionally affect the musculoskeletal system, and the gastrointestinal tract.

Most cats come into contact with these two viruses (Rhinotracheitis, Calici) in their lifetime, but those cats that have been vaccinated or are equipped with a strong immune system can quickly shake off the disease. Young kittens and unvaccinated cats are more vulnerable to the disease. Cats or kittens that become infected with this virus can become lifetime carriers of calici.

**Signs & Symptoms:** Discharge from eyes, nose, or mouth, fever, labored breathing, ulcers in the mouth, nose or on the pad of their feet, limping, lethargy, and anorexia.

**Transmission:** Direct contact with an infected cat, or contact with eye, nasal or mouth discharge, contaminated food/water bowls, bedding, hands and clothes. Calicivirus is resistant to many disinfectants and can live in the environment for long periods of time.

It is possible for cats to remain carriers for years after infection. This means even though they have recovered from infection, the virus is still shed in bodily excretions and it is still possible for them to infect other cats.

**P is for Panleukopenia:** Panleukopenia is a highly contagious viral disease of cats caused by the feline parvovirus. Because the FP virus is everywhere in the environment, virtually all kittens and cats are exposed to the virus at some point in their lives. Vaccination is extremely important because the rates of illness and death from FP are high in unvaccinated cats. The feline parvovirus infects and kills cells that are rapidly dividing, such as those in the bone marrow, intestines and developing fetus. Infected cats usually develop panleukopenia (shortages of all types of white blood cells) because the parvovirus infection damages the bone marrow and lymph nodes. White blood cells are necessary for the immune system's response to infection. A decrease in red blood cells may also occur.

**Signs & Symptoms:** The signs of FP may vary and may be similar to other illnesses. The first visible signs an owner might notice include generalized depression, loss of appetite, high fever, lethargy, vomiting, severe diarrhea, nasal discharge, and dehydration. Sick cats may sit for long periods of time in front of their water bowls but not drink much water. Normally, the sickness may go on for three or four days after the first fever. In some cats, the fever will come and go during the illness and abruptly fall to lower than normal levels shortly before death.

Cats are very good at hiding disease and by the time cat displays the signs of illness, it may be severely ill. Therefore, if any abnormal behaviors or signs of illness are observed, it is important to have your cat examined by a veterinarian as soon as possible. FP may be suspected based in history of exposure to an infected cat, lack of vaccination, and the visible signs of illness. When that history of exposure combined with blood tests that show very reduced levels of all white blood cell types.

**Transmission:** Cats can shed the virus in their urine, stool, and nasal secretions, and infection occurs when susceptible cats come in contact with blood, urine, stool, nasal secretions, or even fleas from infected cats. An infected cat tends to shed the virus for a relatively short period of time (1-2 days), but the virus can survive for up to a year in the environment. So cats often become infected without ever coming into contact with an infected cat. Bedding, cages, food dishes, and the hands or clothing of people who handle the infected cat may harbor the virus and transmit to other cats.

In most cases once a cat recovers from FP, it will not infect other cats through direct contact, but some recovered cats can shed the virus in their stool and urine for up to 6 weeks. Cats that survive an infection develop immunity that likely protects them for the rest of their lives. Mild cases that go unnoticed will also produce immunity from future infection. These viruses are serious and have the potential to be deadly. We highly recommend all cats receive a distemper vaccine (FVRCP) starting at 8 weeks of age and annually to tri-annually for the rest of their lives.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

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