

Vaccinations For My Cat

Lucky for us, there are vaccines to help prevent many illnesses that affect cats. Vaccinating your cat has long been considered one of the easiest ways to help her live a long, healthy life. Not only are there different vaccines for different diseases, there are different types and combinations of vaccines.

Although vaccination has the potential to protect pets against life-threatening diseases, vaccination is not without its risks. Recently, there has been some controversy regarding duration of protection and timing of vaccination, as well as the safety and necessity of certain vaccines. What does this all mean for your cat? Vaccination is a procedure that has risks and benefits that must be weighed for every patient relative to their lifestyle and health. Your veterinarian can determine a vaccination regime that will provide the safest and best protection for your individual cat. Here are answers to some of your most frequently asked questions regarding vaccines:

What Exactly Are Vaccines?

Vaccines help prepare the body's immune system to fight the invasion of disease-causing organisms. Vaccines contain antigens, which look like the disease-causing organism to the immune system but don't actually cause disease. When the vaccine is introduced to the body, the immune system is mildly stimulated. If a cat is ever exposed to the real disease, his immune system is now prepared to recognize and fight it off entirely or reduce its severity.

How Important Are Vaccines to the Health of My Cat?

Bottom line—vaccines are very important in managing the health of your cats. That said, not every cat needs to be vaccinated against every disease. It is very important to discuss with your veterinarian a vaccination protocol that's right for your cat. Factors that should be examined include age, medical history, environment and lifestyle. Most vets highly recommend administering core vaccines to healthy cats.

What Are Core Vaccines?

The American Association of Feline Practitioners divided vaccines into two categories—core and non-core. Core vaccines are considered vital to all cats and protect against panleukopenia (feline distemper), feline calici virus, feline herpes virus type I (rhinotracheitis) and rabies. Non-core vaccines are given depending on the cat's lifestyle; these include vaccines for feline leukemia virus, Bordetella, Chlamydomydia felis and feline immunodeficiency virus. Your veterinarian can determine what vaccines are best for your cat.

Are Any Vaccines Required By Law?

Each state has its own laws governing the administration of the rabies vaccine. Some areas require yearly rabies vaccination. Other areas call for vaccines every three years. In almost all states, proof of rabies vaccination is mandatory.

How Often Should My Adult Cat Be Vaccinated?

Your veterinarian can best determine a vaccination schedule for your cat. This will depend on the type of vaccine, your cat's age, medical history, environment and lifestyle. Adult cats might be revaccinated annually or every three years.

When Should My Kitten Be Vaccinated?

Kittens automatically receive antibodies in the milk their mother produces if their mother has a healthy immune system. These antibodies help protect against infectious disease until the kitten's own immune system develops. When the kitten is around six to eight weeks of age, your veterinarian can begin to administer a series of vaccines at three- or four-week intervals until the kitten reaches 16 weeks of age.

Are There Any Risks Associated With Vaccines?

Immunizations are supposed to mildly stimulate the animal's immune system in order to create protection from specific infectious diseases. This stimulation can create mild symptoms, ranging from soreness at the injection site to fever and allergic reactions. There are other, less common side effects like injection site tumors and immune disease associated with vaccination. That said, it is important to realize that vaccines have saved countless lives, and play a vital role in the battle against feline infectious disease. As with any medical procedure, there is a small chance of side effects. In most cases, the risks are much smaller than the risks of disease itself. But it is important to talk to your veterinarian about your cat's medical history before he is vaccinated.

What Symptoms Should I Look For?

Most cats show no ill effect from vaccination. Vaccine reactions are usually minor and short-lived. Clinical signs include:

- Fever
- Sluggishness
- Loss of appetite
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Swelling and redness around the injection site
- Lameness
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What Should I Do if I Think My Cat is Having an Adverse Reaction to a Vaccine?

If you suspect your cat is having a reaction to a vaccine, call your veterinarian immediately.

