

Kitten Vaccinations and Care

Distemper

The feline distemper vaccine actually includes four separate elements: distemper or panleukopenia, herpesvirus, calicivirus, and chlamydia. Feline distemper is a severe viral disease that is frequently fatal. Symptoms include not eating, vomiting, diarrhea, and fever. Herpesvirus, calicivirus, and chlamydia all cause upper respiratory infections. These may result in sneezing, eye or nasal discharge, and conjunctivitis. Although vaccination does not provide complete protection, it will reduce the likelihood of infection and the severity of disease if infected.

Kittens need a distemper combination every 3-4 weeks starting at 6-8 weeks until 16 weeks of age. It is very important this schedule be followed. The kitten's mother will pass antibodies to them if she has been well vaccinated.

Rabies

A fatal virus of the central nervous system usually transmitted through a bite from an infected animal. This vaccination is especially important since rabies is fatal to humans and their pets and is being seen with increased frequency in raccoons, bats, skunks, and foxes.

Your kitten will receive a rabies vaccine good for one year after 12 weeks of age. The following year the rabies vaccine will be good for three years in the state of Virginia.

Feline leukemia virus (Felv) and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV)

Both of these diseases affect the immune system and are eventually fatal. Kittens should be tested for both of these viruses. A safe and effective vaccine exists for leukemia, but not for FIV. Both of these diseases are passed through contact with other cats. FIV is passed through fighting and Felv is passed through bites, grooming, sharing food bowls, etc. Therefore, all cats with potential exposure to other cats (i.e. outdoor cats) should be vaccinated for leukemia. This consists of a series of two vaccines 2-4 weeks apart and then yearly vaccination. Any lapse in this schedule requires retesting and restarting the vaccine series.

Heartworm

Heartworms are the most life-threatening of all canine parasites. These worms are now being found in cats as well. Heartworms are passed through mosquitoes and even indoor cats are at risk. They live within the large vessels that supply blood to the lungs and cause significant damage to the lungs. Luckily, cats are five times more resistant than dogs to infection. That said, there is no effective treatment if your cat becomes infected. Symptoms include coughing, vomiting, a decrease in eating, and possibly sudden death. Monthly heartworm preventatives are available in pill and topical form that are very safe and effective in preventing disease. Since the risk of infection is much less than dogs, it is usually recommended in outdoor cats only.

Intestinal Parasites

Roundworms are by far the most common kitten intestinal parasite. This is because almost all kittens acquire them through their mother's milk. Roundworms are also a health risk for people, especially children. Hookworms can also be found in kittens and usually result in weight loss. Tapeworms are passed through ingestion of a rodent or a flea. The eggs of most intestinal parasites will usually show up in a fecal analysis. Tapeworm eggs are rarely seen in our analysis, but usually you will notice rice like segments around the anus.

Your kitten will be dewormed twice 3-4 weeks apart for roundworms. A fecal analysis should be checked to make sure that other intestinal parasites are not present. This test is repeated yearly.

Typical Kitten Visits

Six to Eight weeks:

Distemper
Deworming
Felv/FIV testing
+/- Leukemia

Ten to Twelve weeks:

Distemper
Deworming
Fecal analysis
+/-Leukemia

Fourteen to Sixteen weeks:

Distemper
Rabies

ANY TIME YOUR CAT RECEIVES A VACCINE IT IS POSSIBLE FOR THEM TO HAVE AN ALLERGIC REACTION.

This can occur at any point in their lifetime so they should always be watched for a couple of hours after vaccination. Symptoms of a vaccine reaction include vomiting, diarrhea, facial swelling, and hives. If these symptoms are seen, immediately return to the clinic. If the clinic is closed, please contact any of the following emergency services: in Alexandria call (703) 823-3601, in Springfield call (703) 451-8900, in Fairfax call (703) 752-9100. It is normal for your kitten to be tired after vaccinations. They should have a normal attitude the next day. Sometimes there will be a small swelling within the skin at the site of vaccination. This is acceptable if it continues to decrease in size and is completely gone within a month.