

Vaccination Recommendations for Cats and Kittens

[Race Foster, DVM](#)

[Marty Smith, DVM](#)

[Holly Nash, DVM, MS](#)

Drs. Foster & Smith, Inc.



Experts generally agree on what vaccines are 'core' vaccines for cats, i.e., what vaccines should be given to every cat, and what vaccines are given only to certain cats (noncore). Whether to vaccinate with noncore vaccines depends upon a number of things including the age, breed, and health status of the cat, the potential exposure of the cat to an animal that has the disease, the type of vaccine and how common the disease is in the geographical area where the cat lives or may visit.

In cats, the suggested core vaccines are feline panleukopenia (distemper), feline viral rhinotracheitis, feline calicivirus, and rabies.

The American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) recommends vaccinating against feline panleukopenia (distemper), feline viral rhinotracheitis, and feline calicivirus every three years. But they also suggest that cats at a high risk of exposure to these diseases may benefit from more frequent vaccinations. Since vaccinating every three years does not agree with the current manufacturers' directions of vaccinating annually, when to vaccinate, and with what, must be a personal (and informed) choice for each cat owner. Consult with your veterinarian to determine what is best for your cat.

The noncore vaccines include feline leukemia (FeLV), feline infectious peritonitis (FIP), ringworm, and chlamydia. The AAFP recommends AGAINST FeLV vaccinations in totally indoor cats who have no exposure to other cats. FIP vaccinations should only be given to cats who have a possibility of being exposed to it through other cats. The choice to use chlamydia and ringworm vaccines is based upon the prevalence of the disease and husbandry conditions.

AVMA Vaccination Recommendations for Cats

| Component | Class | Efficacy | Length of Immunity | Risk/Severity of Adverse Effects | Comments |
|---------------------------------|-------|--|--------------------|--|--|
| Panleukopenia | Core | High | > 1 year | Low to Moderate | Use caution with intranasal modified live virus (MLV) vaccines in stressed kittens |
| Rhinotracheitis | Core | High; may not prevent infection or carrier state | > 1 year | Moderate; MLV vaccine can cause carrier state | Use killed vaccine in catteries where respiratory disease is not a problem; use intranasal vaccine for faster protection |
| Calicivirus | Core | Variable; may not prevent infection or carrier state | > 1 year | Higher for MLV vaccines that can cause carrier state | Killed vaccines prevent acute signs of disease and do not cause carrier state |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|----------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Rabies | Core | High | Dependent upon type of vaccine | Low to moderate | |
| Feline Leukemia | Core for all cats that live outside full or part time, or those living full time inside but with exposure to outside cats | Variable | Revaccinate annually | Vaccine-related sarcomas can develop | Vaccination not recommended for cats with minimal or no risk, especially after 4 months of age; blood test prior to vaccination |
| Chlamydia | Noncore | Low | < 1 year | High | Not recommended for cats at minimal or no risk |
| Feline Infectious Peritonitis | Noncore | Low | | | |
| Dermatophytosis (Ringworm) | Noncore | Low | | | |
| Bordetella | Noncore | Low | Short | May be more severe in kittens | |
| Giardia | Insufficient data to comment | | | | |
| Feline Immunodeficiency Virus | Insufficient data to comment | | | | |

A possible vaccination schedule for the 'average' indoor house cat is shown below.

| Cat Vaccination Schedule | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Age | Vaccination |
| 7 weeks | Combination Vaccine* |
| 10 weeks | Combination vaccine Chlamydia (Pneumonitis): include in combination vaccine where it is a concern. Feline Leukemia (FeLV): for kittens at risk of exposure to feline leukemia virus. |
| 12 weeks or older | Rabies: Given by your local veterinarian (age at vaccination may vary according to local law). |
| 13 weeks | Combination vaccine Chlamydia (Pneumonitis): include in combination vaccine where it is a concern. FeLV: for kittens at risk of exposure to feline leukemia virus. |
| 16 & 19 weeks | Feline infectious peritonitis (FIP): for kittens at risk of exposure to feline infectious peritonitis. |
| Adult (boosters)** | Combination vaccine Chlamydia (Pneumonitis): include in combination vaccine where it is a concern. FeLV: for cats at risk of exposure to feline leukemia virus. FIP: for cats at risk of exposure to feline infectious peritonitis. Rabies: Given by your local veterinarian (time interval |

between vaccinations may vary according to law).

*A combination vaccine includes feline distemper, rhinotracheitis, and calicivirus. Some may also include chlamydia.

**According to the American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Association of Feline Practitioners, cats at low risk of disease exposure may not need to be boosted yearly for most diseases. Consult with your local veterinarian to determine the appropriate vaccination schedule for your cat. Remember, recommendations vary depending on the age, breed, and health status of the cat, the potential of the cat to be exposed to the disease, the type of vaccine, whether the cat is used for breeding, and the geographical area where the cat lives or may visit.

References

Al-Sarraf, R. Update on feline vaccine-associated fibrosarcomas. *Veterinary Medicine*. 1998: 729-35.

American Association of Feline Practitioners/Academy of Feline Medicine. Recommendations for Feline Leukemia Virus Testing. *The Compendium on Continuing Education for the Practicing Veterinarian*. 1997:1105-7.

Bell, FW. Recommendations for FeLV- and FIV-positive cats with cancer. In August, JR (ed.) *Consultations in Feline Internal Medicine*. W.B. Saunders Co. Philadelphia, PA; 1997:572-8.

Bergman, PJ; Couto, CG; Hendrick, MJ; Macy, DW; Richards, JR; Starr, RM (contributors). Vaccine-associated feline sarcoma symposium. Sponsored by the Vaccine-Associated Feline Sarcoma Task Force and the Arm & Hammer Division of Church & Swight Co., Inc. July 25, 1998.

Brakeman, L (ed.) Researchers suspect genetic cause for vaccine site sarcomas. *dvm* 1998; July:1,41-45.

Cole, R. Rethinking canine vaccinations. *Veterinary Forum*; 1998 (Jan): 52-7.

Greene, CE. Immunoprophylaxis and immunotherapy. In Greene, CE (ed.) *Infectious Diseases of the Dog and Cat*. W.B. Saunders Co. Philadelphia, PA; 1998;717-750.

Jarrett, O. Development of vaccines against feline leukemia virus. In Kirk, RW; Bonagura, JD (eds.) *Current Veterinary Therapy XI*. W.B. Saunders Co. Philadelphia, PA; 1992:457-60.

Klingborg, DJ; Husted, DR; Curry-Galvin, EA; Gumley, NR; Henry, SC; Bain, FT; et al. AVMA Council on Biologic and Therapeutic Agents' report on cat and dog vaccines. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. November 15, 2002 (Volume 221, No. 10); 1401-1407.

Pfizer Animal Health. Duration of immunity in companion animals after natural infection and vaccination. *Pfizer Animal Health*; June 30, 1998.

Roitt, I; Brostoff, J; Male, D. *Immunology*. CV Mosby Company. St. Louis, MO; 1985.

Rosen, DK. Feline infectious diseases and rational vaccine protocols for immunization. Presented at the Wisconsin Veterinary Medical Association Convention. October 10, 1998.

Schultz, RD. Current and future canine and feline vaccination programs. *Veterinary Medicine*. 1998; 233-253.

Tizard, I; Yawei, N. Use of serologic testing to assess immune status of companion animals. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. 1998;213; 54-60.

Veterinary Learning Systems. Recombinant vaccine technology. Supplement to *The Compendium on Continuing Education for the Practicing Veterinarian*. 1997;19(2).

Veterinary Learning Systems. Vaccine technology in the 21st century. Supplement to *The Compendium on Continuing Education for the Practicing Veterinarian*. 1998;20(8c).

Copyright © 1997-2008, Foster & Smith, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
Reprinted from PetEducation.com.