

Vaccines for Cats – Synopsis of a ClientEd Handout

How do vaccines work?

Vaccines work by stimulating the body's immune system to recognize and fight a particular microorganism such as a virus, bacteria, or other infectious organism. Once vaccinated, the animal's immune system is then primed, or prepared to react to a future infection with that microorganism. In other words, the vaccine mimics a true infection so that the immune system can better protect the body in the future.



Which vaccines are needed in cats?

In all cases, decisions regarding the vaccine types and vaccine schedules that are best for each cat require the advice of your veterinarian.

At this time, **core vaccines**, as recommended by the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) for all kittens and cats, include the following:

- feline panleukopenia (FPL) also known as feline infectious enteritis or feline distemper, caused by FPL virus or feline parvovirus (FPLV).
- feline viral rhinotracheitis (FVR), also known as herpes virus type 1 (FHV-1) caused by FVR virus.
- feline caliciviral disease caused by various strains of feline caliciviruses (FCV).
- rabies caused by rabies virus.

Non-core (discretionary, or optional vaccines), as recommended by the AAFP for kittens and cats with a risk of exposure to specific diseases:

- feline chlamydiosis caused by *Chlamydophila felis* infection.
- feline leukemia disease complex caused by feline leukemia virus (FeLV).
Considered core in any cat less than 1 year of age
- bordetellosis caused by the bacterium *Bordetella bronchiseptica*.

Vaccines that are not recommended by the AAFP, but that may be appropriate under certain conditions include the following:

- feline infectious peritonitis (FIP) caused by FIP virus or feline coronavirus.
- giardiasis caused by the protozoan parasite *Giardia lamblia*.
- ringworm

How often should booster vaccinations be given?

In the past, veterinarians recommended booster vaccinations for cats on a yearly basis. However, as we learn more about, and improve vaccines, recommendations regarding booster frequency continue to evolve. The appropriate interval for boosters will vary with individual lifestyle.

"It is important to thoroughly discuss your cat's lifestyle with your veterinarian and determine the appropriate vaccinations and vaccination schedule for your cat."

Most adult cats that received the full booster series of vaccines as kittens should be revaccinated every one to three years based on a lifestyle risk assessment. That is, if your cat is at higher risk for exposure to a disease, the more frequent vaccination schedule (every year) may be recommended. It is important to thoroughly discuss your cat's lifestyle with your veterinarian and determine the appropriate vaccinations and vaccination schedule for your cat.

The AAFP vaccination guidelines recommend vaccinations for kittens, at one year old, every three years for the **core vaccines**, and then as determined by your veterinarian for any **non-core vaccines**.