

## Get the 'flu jab now!

It is still a relatively common site at the surgery to see cats, and especially kittens, presenting with sneezing, runny eyes and runny noses. Some of these cats are very sick, with extensive ulcers in the mouth, making it difficult for them to eat with others developing painful ulcers in the eyes. As many of you probably recognise these are the symptoms of cat 'flu. This condition is caused by several viruses, usually a Herpes virus and a calicivirus. Because of this antibiotics are often ineffective, although they do help kill the bacteria that grow where the viruses have caused the initial infection (secondary infection).

Many of these cats recover although many need medication to help them through the initial stages of the disease. Anti-inflammatory drugs and drugs to ease mucous accumulation often help while the cats own immunity gradually overcomes the disease. Steam and menthol/eucalyptus preparations often help when the cat has a marked discharge from its nose. Strong smelling foods such as sardines often help the appetite. Unfortunately a significant proportion of these cats do not fully recover. Some become carriers of the virus and when the cats' immune system is lowered, usually by stress, they may exhibit symptoms again, or just shed the virus and infect other cats. Others can develop a long term sinus infection and have a permanent discharge from their nose. Some of these need permanent antibiotics to improve their quality of life.



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Unfortunately the process of giving birth usually lowers a cats' immunity to start the carriers shedding the virus. All the kittens become infected and the whole cycle begins again. Hence it is not wise to breed from cats that have previously exhibited signs of cat flu.

The main method of spread of the cat 'flu viruses is by direct contact of one cat with another. Large amounts of virus are present in saliva, tears and nasal secretions (some may also be shed in urine and faeces). Thus it can be spread by cats sniffing each other, mutual grooming and sharing feeding bowls.

Sneezed droplets may travel 1-2 metres and cat 'flu can spread rapidly through a cattery unless cats are housed individually with sneeze barriers. Both of the cat 'flu viruses are relatively fragile: calicivirus lasts about a week outside the cat and Herpes lasts a day. Plainly, however, these viruses can be spread within a cattery on cages, food dishes, litter trays, people, etc. so good hygiene precautions should be taken.

Incidentally I am often asked this question! Cats cannot catch 'flu from humans with 'flu nor can humans or other animals catch cat 'flu

There are many vaccines available for cat 'flu. Kittens are routinely vaccinated from eight to nine weeks of age, receiving a second dose at 12 weeks old, or three weeks after the initial injection. Cats should receive a yearly booster dose. Hence the disease is easily preventable so if your cat is not covered then please contact your Veterinary Surgeon as soon as possible. It really is not worth taking the risk.

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