

# Vaccine schedule for kittens

## 6-9 weeks old

### Distemper/Upper respiratory combo vaccine

#### What is feline distemper?

Feline distemper (more correctly called “panleukopenia”) is caused by a “parvovirus” and represents a life threatening disease. The feline distemper/panleukopenia virus is considered ubiquitous, meaning it is present in virtually every place that is not regularly disinfected. The infection is highly contagious among unvaccinated cats, usually kittens and young adult cats living in groups. Barn cats, feral colonies, animal shelter groups, pet stores, and rescue facilities are high risk for outbreaks.



Despite the highly contagious nature of all feline upper respiratory agents, it is important to realize that most cats are at very small risk for exposure. In other words, in order to get this kind of infection, a cat must be in the same home as an infected cat or share the same human caretaker, toys or food bowls. Typically infected cats come from the shelter, are outdoor cats, or are housed in close contact with lots of other cats (experiencing crowding stress). The average house cat that is not exposed to any rescued kittens, lives with only one or two other cats at most never goes outside is unlikely break with infection. Kittens are predisposed due to their immature immune systems and are usually hit the hardest. To some extent, the combinations of symptoms and course of infection is determined by which of numerous infectious agents is responsible. 90% of feline upper respiratory infections are caused by either feline herpes (also called the “rhinotracheitis” virus) or feline calicivirus. Neither of these infections is transmissible to human or to other animals.

#### Diagnosis of Infection.

Any kitten with fever, appetite loss, diarrhea, and/or vomiting is a suspect for feline distemper. Classically, a white blood cell count shows almost no white blood cells; there are very few causes of white cell counts this low and the infection can be considered confirmed.

#### How is cat distemper spread?

Feline distemper is spread by direct contact with contaminated feces, urine, vomit, mucus, blood, and saliva. Fleas can also transmit the virus from cat to cat. A cat is also susceptible to indirect contact to feline distemper from food and water dishes, grooming items, litter trays, cat toys, cat beds, and bedding, rugs, carpeting and other household items. Distemper remains infectious even after the body secretion has been removed or faded away.

#### Which cats are at risk from Feline Distemper?

All cats are at risk from this highly contagious disease. Kittens and un-vaccinated cats that roam are the most vulnerable of all, older cats may develop the immunity to the virus. Feline distemper is known in all parts of the world. The warmer the climate the more chance of an outbreak. Colonies of feral cats are highly susceptible to an outbreak of the virus. Cat distemper has no relationship to canine (dog) distemper, the two are different disease, it is however similar to canine parvovirus.

## 10-12 weeks old

Distemper/Upper respiratory combo with Leukemia vaccine~ optional

### What is Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)?

Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) is one of the most important viruses infecting cats. FeLV tends to become a persistent infection and depresses the immune system of cats. FeLV is an important cause of anemia in cats and can cause cancers of several types.



### Does my cat need to have a blood test before vaccination?

For the vast majority of cats, this is highly recommended. It is important to realize that not all cats that test positive become sick. Approximately 30% of cats infected with FeLV will eliminate the virus and will not contract the disease. Some FeLV-infected cats may not show signs of disease for months or even years.

### Is there any treatment for FeLV infection or disease?

There is currently no specific treatment for FeLV-infected cats. Treatment is usually aimed at easing the symptoms and treating secondary infections. Most FeLV-infected cats will eventually die of diseases related to their infection or will require humane euthanasia.

### How is FeLV transmitted?

Direct contact between cats is the most frequent method of FeLV infection. The virus is fragile and cannot survive longer than a few hours outside of the cat. A cat with FeLV sheds a large quantity of the virus in its saliva as well as in other bodily fluids such as nasal secretions, urine, and feces. However, FeLV is not a highly contagious virus, and transmission generally requires a prolonged period of close contact between infected and susceptible cats. Close contact activities include mating, mutual grooming, and sharing of litter trays and food bowls. Cat bites by an infected cat can readily transmit infection.

### How common is FeLV?

FeLV infection is found worldwide. In general, around 1-2% of the cat population is persistently infected with this virus, and many more are exposed. The proportion of cats infected differs according to the geographical location, environment and the life-style of the cat. Infection is more common in colonies of cats where there is close contact between individuals.

## 13-15 weeks old

Rabies

## What is rabies?

Rabies is a viral disease that can infect all warm-blooded animals, including cats and people, although some species are somewhat naturally resistant to the disease. When signs of rabies occur, it is an almost invariably fatal disease.

## What are the clinical signs of rabies?

Following a bite or scratch from a rabid animal, the disease progresses through three stages:

1. In the first or *prodromal stage*, there is a marked change in temperament; quiet cats become agitated and can become aggressive, while active extroverts may become nervous or shy.
2. This phase is then followed by so-called *furious rabies* that is by far the most common type in the cat. During this phase, excitement predominates and it is at this stage that the cat is most dangerous, both to other animals and to the owner. The cat becomes increasingly nervous, irritable and vicious. Muscle spasms will often prevent swallowing and there is excessive drooling of saliva.
3. The third stage is the *paralytic stage*, which usually occurs after about seven days. Ultimately the cat will become comatose and die.

## How is the virus transmitted?

Rabies virus does not survive long outside a mammal's body. The virus can be shed in the saliva of the infected animals and bite wounds that inject saliva beneath the skin are the usual means of transmission of infection. In North America the skunk, raccoon, fox, and bat are the important reservoirs whereas in Europe foxes are the main source of infection.

Rabies is a zoonotic disease, meaning that it can be transmitted from animal to humans. However, it is only transmitted by the bite of a rabid animal. If you were bitten by any animal that may be rabid, you should immediately wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water and seek advice of a doctor without delay. Suspicious animals include stray or feral dogs or cat and any wild animal, particularly if the animal is showing unusual behavior such as lack of fear of people, excessive salivation, or aggression. Post-exposure rabies treatment with serum or vaccine may be recommended and is very successful in given immediately after exposure.

