



Vaccines

Vaccinating your pets is a very important part of keeping them healthy. This handout will detail the diseases that we protect animals from as well as some information about vaccine titer testing, licensing your dog with the town office, and vaccine reactions.

When an animal is born, they have not yet fully developed their immune system and so they are more susceptible to disease. The maternal antibodies that are produced from the mother provide protection to the animal when they are very young but that protection will wane over time. That is when vaccines become important and we continue to vaccinate animals until their own immune system can take over to help support them.

There is an important distinction to be made from vaccines as to whether they are 'core' vaccines or not. Core vaccines are vaccines which are recommended for all animals no matter their lifestyle and location. We also have 'non-core' vaccines which are vaccines that are administered based on a veterinarian's and owner's agreement on your pet's susceptibility to a problem.

Below is a list of all the diseases that we vaccinate cats against and some information about these diseases (how your pet could contract the disease, what problems the disease causes and how often they should be vaccinated):

1) Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis: This virus can cause an upper respiratory infection and is easily transmitted from cat to cat. Cats can show signs of fever, loss of appetite, sneezing, and/or eye and nasal discharges. Kittens are the most susceptible, but any cat that is not protected can be affected. Unfortunately, effective treatment is limited and a cat may remain a carrier for life. This is considered a core vaccine.

2) Feline Calicivirus: This virus is another cause of upper respiratory infection; it is both widespread and highly contagious. Signs of infection include fever, ulcers, blisters on the tongue, and pneumonia which can be very severe. Treatment is very difficult and a cat who has recovered from the disease can still infect other cats as well as experiencing chronic sneezing, runny eyes, and severe gum disease. This is considered a core vaccine.

3) Feline Panleukopenia (aka: Feline Distemper): This is a highly resistant virus that can survive up to one year outside of a cat's body. Most cats are exposed to this virus at some point and infection rates in unprotected cats' range as high as 90-100%, therefore vaccinating cats against this potentially fatal disease is essential. Signs include, listlessness, diarrhea, vomiting, dehydration, fever, and death. The vaccine is very effective in preventing the disease whereas treatment is both difficult and expensive. This is considered a core vaccine.

4) Rabies: This incurable viral disease affects the central nervous system of almost all mammals, including humans. It spreads through contact of the saliva of infected animals through bites or any break of the skin. This is considered a core vaccine.

5) Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV): This infection can cause many serious health problems - from cancers like leukemia to several secondary infections. FeLV is the leading cause of death from infectious disease in North American cats. After initial exposure, a cat may show no signs for months to years. Fortunately, testing is available to determine the FeLV status of your cat. This vaccine is administered based on lifestyle.

When to Vaccinate: Generally, the immunity that a kitten has at birth begins to diminish after 9 weeks. It is then time to begin the initial vaccinations, with boosters following in 3-4 weeks. Thereafter, your cat will need repeat vaccinations for the rest of his or her life. During your appointments, we will go over the proper intervals for vaccinations base on your cat's lifestyle.

Vaccine Reactions

Although rare, vaccine reactions can occur. There are two types of vaccines reactions:

- 1) Anaphylactic reaction: this reaction is very rare but can be very severe. Generally, an anaphylactic reaction occurs within 1-2 hours after a vaccine has been administered. Signs include swelling of the face, an animal being itchy all over and potentially developing hives. Please be available to monitor your pet after the appointment so that if this occurs you are available to bring them in for care.
- 2) Delayed hypersensitivity: this reaction is also very rare and can occur 1-2 days after the vaccine was administered. Your pet may have decreased energy and may have vomiting and/or diarrhea. If this occurs, please call the hospital.

We recommend that you massage the area where the vaccine was given as this can make it less sore. If you find that massage is uncomfortable, please apply a cool compress to the area for 10-15 minutes.