

# FELINE INFECTIOUS DISEASES

## FELINE INFECTIOUS ENTERITIS

Also known as feline panleukopaenia or feline parvovirus, feline infectious enteritis is a viral infection which may cause severe illness in unprotected cats. Signs include diarrhoea/vomiting and the cat will show marked depression/lethargy. Infection during pregnancy can lead to brain damage in the kittens. The virus is very resistant and can remain in the environment for up to 12 months.

Effective **vaccination** is available given at **9 and 12 weeks** and then as an annual booster.

*Catteries insist on Feline Infectious Enteritis vaccination before boarding.*

## CAT 'FLU

Flu-like symptoms in cats (e.g. sneezing and runny eyes) may be caused by Feline Calici Virus or Feline Herpes Virus (also known as feline rhino-tracheitis virus). Virus is present in large amounts in saliva, tears and nasal secretions and is usually spread by droplets from sneezing cats. It may also survive outside the cat for short periods so infection can be transmitted on feed bowls etc. Most cats recover with supportive treatment but some cats can remain infected with virus and may suffer recurrent attacks of sinusitis or gingivitis even after they are apparently healthy again. In very young or immuno-suppressed cats (e.g. those with FeLV or FIV infection or on certain medication) cat 'flu can progress to a life threatening pneumonia.

**Vaccination** is given combined with Feline Infectious Enteritis vaccination at **9 and 12 weeks** and then as an annual booster.

*Catteries insist on cat flu vaccinations before boarding.*



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## CHLAMYDIA

Chlamydia are intracellular bugs which can cause recurrent conjunctivitis, flu-like symptoms and reproductive problems. The disease is particularly common in kittens and highly contagious between cats. Potentially humans or other animals could become infected. Once established the disease takes several weeks of treatment to eradicate. A vaccine is now available consisting of an initial course of 2 injections 3 weeks apart and yearly boosters.

## FELINE LEUKAEMIA VIRUS (FeLV)

Feline Leukaemia Virus can cause a range of problems in cats, including anaemia, leukaemia, some type of tumour and an increased susceptibility to other diseases. The virus is only spread by close contact (most frequently in saliva), although young kittens can become infected in their mother's uterus. There may be a long incubation period (up to several years) between infection and the development of signs, but 85% of cats die within 3.5 years of becoming permanently infected. The prevalence of this disease has been greatly reduced by vaccination.

**Vaccination** is given combined with Feline Infectious Enteritis and cat flu vaccination at **9 and 12 weeks** and then as an annual booster.

It is particularly important with Feline leukaemia vaccination that boosters are given on time as a lapse in protection could allow infection which may not become apparent for months or years.

## FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS (FIV)

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (a virus closely related to the human AIDS virus) can cause signs similar to Feline leukaemia virus. A blood test is available but as yet there is no vaccine. There is no risk of the infection being passed to humans.



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## CORONA VIRUS / FELINE INFECTIOUS PERITONITIS (FIP)

Feline Corona Virus is a highly contagious virus which is spread in saliva and faeces. In most cats there may be no signs or a mild transient diarrhoea. However a very small proportion of infected cats may develop Feline Infectious Peritonitis which can lead to abdominal swelling and other signs. Once symptoms develop the disease is almost invariably fatal. Blood tests for Feline Corona Virus are available but do not distinguish the cats which have merely been exposed to the virus from those which have developed disease.

### **INTERFERON TREATMENT**

Antiviral treatment with Interferon may be offered to some cats with the viral conditions detailed above. If you would like to know more about this therapy, and whether it may be appropriate for your cat please make an appointment with one of the veterinary surgeons.

## RINGWORM

Ringworm is a fungal infection of the superficial layers of the skin, hairs and nails. In cats *Microsporum canis* is responsible for almost all ringworm infections. In addition to being infectious to cats and dogs this can also cause disease in people. Diagnosis is usually made by examining hairs for fluorescence under ultra-violet light, by microscopic examination or culture.

Although in many cats ringworm is a self-limiting infection (signs typically resolve in 3-5 months), treatment of the disease is nearly always indicated to minimise the risk of infection to humans or other pets. Treatment may be in the form of oral medication, creams or washes dependent on the extent of the disease. It is also important to take appropriate steps to minimise exposure to the fungus while the cat is being treated. If any humans in the house develop skin lesions (small patches of skin thickening and reddening, or patches of hair loss) early medical attention should be sought. Ringworm in humans generally responds very well to treatment.



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## TOXOPLASMOSIS

Toxoplasmosis is a disease caused by infection with the organism called *Toxoplasma gondii*, a microscopic single-cell organism which is one of the most common parasites of animals. Although virtually all warm-blooded animals, including man, can be infected with this bug, it is an extremely well adapted parasite and rarely causes significant disease to the individuals which it infects.

Cats are infected by eating another infected animal (usually a rodent). In cats *T. gondii* multiplies in the intestinal tract resulting in the shedding of eggs in the faeces. Shedding of eggs only occurs in the period immediately following infection. These eggs shed in very resistant, and can contaminate the environment for several years. Other animals become infected by eating these eggs.

Around 30% of adults in the UK have been exposed to *Toxoplasma*. As with infection in cats, the vast majority of people infected with this organism experience no clinical disease at all, or possibly just mild and transient 'flu'-like signs. However, if a pregnant woman acquires *Toxoplasma* infection during her pregnancy, the infection may be transmitted to the foetus, and sometimes causes severe damage. This is only a risk if the woman acquires the infection during her pregnancy. A woman who has previously been exposed to the organism carries no risk of transmission to a foetus if she subsequently becomes pregnant.

***We strongly advise that pregnant women do not clean out cat litter trays or where this is unavoidable that rubber gloves are worn and strict hygiene precautions are followed.***



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