



Your guide to

KITTEN CARE



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KITTEN HEALTH INFORMATION

Vaccination

Several contagious diseases occur in cats in Sydney. Vaccination is the best way to protect your cat. We advise vaccination of cats against Feline Panleucopenia virus and the common cat flu viruses: Feline Herpesvirus I and Feline Calicivirus.

Kittens require a series of three vaccinations, performed 3-4 weeks apart, ideally done at:

- 8-10 weeks
- 12-14 weeks
- 16-18 weeks

Kittens will not be protected until 14 days after the final injection.



In order to get the best immune response, we recommend that the final kitten vaccination is performed no earlier than 16 weeks of age. Some kittens who start vaccinations earlier than 8 weeks old may be recommended to have 4 vaccines in total to meet this requirement.

The current recommendation for most adult cats is annual vaccination against Feline Herpesvirus and Calicivirus, and vaccination every 3 years against Panleucopaenia. Newer "split" vaccines now allow us to vaccinate according to this protocol. However, if your cats' living situation is deemed long-term "low risk" (purely indoor; solitary cats who don't go into boarding) during a veterinary assessment, you may elect to reduce to vaccination for all three diseases once every 3 years.

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus and Feline Leukaemia Virus can be vaccinated against but we do not routinely do this.

Intestinal Worms

Intestinal worms cause kittens to grow poorly or even to die. Kittens must be wormed repeatedly as follows:

- Every 2 weeks until they are 12 weeks old, then
- Every month until 6 months old, then
- Every 3-6 months for life

There are a variety of products available for worming. These include:

- a All-wormer tablets or chews e.g. Drontal or Milbemax
- b Partial-wormer topical liquid e.g. Profender (safe from 8 weeks of age)
- c Partial-wormer & flea control topical liquid e.g. Revolution (safe from 8 weeks) or Advocate (safe from 9 weeks of age)

All-worming is recommended for kittens up to 6 months old. Partial worming is the sufficient for most adult cats. However, if your cat spends significant time outdoors, it is recommended to still give an all-wormer tablet every 6-12 months.

Fleas

Fleas are the most problematic parasite in the world. They can cause severe skin disease (flea allergy dermatitis) and can be difficult to diagnose. A cat suffering from flea allergy may never actually be seen with fleas! All products must be used every month all year to be effective. The following flea prevention products are easy-to-apply topical drops that kill adult fleas:

- Revolution (from 8 weeks of age)
- Advantage (from 4 weeks)
- Advocate (from 9 weeks)

In the case of a flea infestation, any of the above topical products can be combined with small size Capstar tablets (one tablet orally every 1-3 days, safe from 4 weeks old in animals >1kg), combined with environmental treatment that our vets can discuss with you. There is also a very effective monthly flea prevention tablet called Comfortis (safe from 14 weeks old), which we would recommend switching to for long-term control, if your cat is diagnosed with sensitive skin or flea allergy dermatitis.

Check the label carefully when you buy a new flea product- some are safe for dogs but toxic if applied to cats. Please ask our vets if you are in doubt.



Ticks

Paralysis ticks are common in certain areas of Sydney, especially near bushland and water. They cause paralysis of all the muscles and if untreated, pets die from asphyxiation. Treatment can be expensive and involves the administration of an intravenous antitoxin. Ticks are most prevalent from August through to March.

Frontline Spray is the only product registered for tick prevention in cats and it can be applied to kittens as young as 1 week old. It is very effective but must be sprayed all over the cat at the labelled tick prevention dose, every 3 weeks.

Even when treated with Frontline, cats must be checked for ticks daily in tick season. This is done by running your fingertips over the skin, feeling for lumps. Most ticks are found on the head, neck and ears but you must check the skin all over.

Signs of tick paralysis may include one or more of the following:

- Coughing or grunting sounds
- Difficult or fast breathing
- Not eating
- Reluctance to jump or even walk
- Vomiting or retching
- Weakness
- Loss or change of voice (meow)
- Wobbly back legs



Heartworm

This worm is spread by mosquitoes and can damage the lungs, however the disease is uncommon in cats and regular use of preventatives is optional. Revolution or Advocate monthly topical drops will prevent heartworm.

Desexing

Desexed pets are less likely to spray urine, wander, fight or get injured. Desexed cats are protected from certain cancers and females won't show noisy calling behaviour when on heat. We recommend male and female cats be desexed by 6 months of age. The pets come in to hospital in the morning (without breakfast), have their operation under general anaesthesia and go home the same evening (males) or following day (females)

Pet identification

All cats must be microchipped by law but in addition to the compulsory NSW register, you can have your pet registered on the national database (the Australian Animal Register, AAR). Make sure your details are kept up-to-date on both registers so that your cat can be reunited with you quickly if he/she is ever lost. Pets are returned home even faster if they always wear a collar with your phone number engraved on the tag.

Feeding

There are many commercial foods designed to meet the exact nutritional requirements of growing kittens. The brands do vary in quality, with the premium brands aiming to provide higher quality ingredients to the growing cat. Choose a "kitten" or "growth" variety until the cat reaches 12 months old. At 8 weeks old, kittens need to be fed 3 times per day. From 4-5 months of age, this can be reduced to 2 larger meals per day. Meal size guidelines can be found on the food label. Any change of diet must be made gradually, over 3-5 days, to prevent your new kitten getting diarrhoea.

It is very important for long-term health to keep your adult cat in lean, muscular body condition. Please ask our vets to learn more about healthy body condition scores in cats.

Diet and dental care

Your cat's diet can influence the health of his/her teeth and gums. Many people feed their cats raw bones each day to help clean the teeth (e.g. chicken necks or wings). However the pet should be supervised when eating bones as there is a risk of the bone causing mouth or intestinal injury or constipation. Never feed your cat cooked bones as these are much more likely to cause problems. An easier alternative to consider is a dental dry food, such as Hills t/d or Royal Canin Dental.

The "gold standard" in dental health is daily brushing with a pet toothpaste, and kittenhood is the perfect time to introduce this to your cat.

BEHAVIOUR, TRAINING AND PET INSURANCE

Cat behaviour and training

If his/her basic needs are not met, your cat may feel stressed. Stress can affect both health and behaviour. This is particularly important for indoor cats. We recommend cats are kept indoors to protect them from fighting, car accidents and infectious diseases, and to protect the local wildlife.

The following hints will help your cat stay happy and healthy.

- Place food and litter boxes such that another animal (or human!) cannot sneak up on the cat while he/she uses them, and away from noisy appliances. To keep them appealing to the cat, food and water should be fresh, and the litter box cleaned every day. Cats require at least one litterbox each!
- Give your cat some special cat scratching furniture to help them keep their claws short and express normal behaviours acceptably. Praise them profusely when you see them use the scratch mat or post to let them know that this is theirs to use.
- Provide places to hide, to climb and to look out of windows.
- Toys allow cats to pretend they are catching their dinner and can be as simple as crumpled paper balls, empty cardboard boxes or ping pong balls. String, foil or buttons are potential hazards and are not recommended.
- If you ever see your kitten chewing on lily flowers/leaves please contact your vet as they are extremely poisonous to cats.
- Cats respond to praise not punishment. Reprimands only work if you catch your cat "in the act". If you do catch your cat making a mistake, it is better to create a distraction by making a loud noise or throwing something (NOT at the cat!) that will attract his attention, but not toward you.
- Veterinary behaviourist Kirsty Seksel's book 'Training your cat' is designed to teach you how to have fun with your new kitten as well as train them to become a well behaved family member.

For more information about indoor cat wellbeing see indoorpets.osu.edu/cats



Pet Health Insurance

Pet insurance can be a life saver. Modern veterinary care is surprisingly advanced and we can offer a high level of care if your cat becomes seriously ill or injured. However, unlike the human health care system there is no government funding to help pay for the treatment, and it can become expensive. A number of companies offer pet health insurance to help you give your pet the best care when they need it. All of our vets strongly recommend you take out pet insurance when your pet is 8 weeks of age.

