

Vaccines & Vaccination Schedule for Cats & Kittens

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Experts generally agree on what vaccines are 'core' vaccines for cats, i.e., what vaccines should be given to every cat, and what vaccines are given only to certain cats (noncore). Whether to vaccinate with noncore vaccines depends upon a number of things including the age, breed, and health status of the cat, the potential exposure of the cat to an animal that has the disease, the type of vaccine and how common the disease is in the geographical area where the cat lives or may visit.

In cats, the suggested core vaccines are feline panleukopenia (distemper), feline viral rhinotracheitis, feline calicivirus, and rabies.

The American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) recommends vaccinating against feline panleukopenia (distemper), feline viral rhinotracheitis, and feline calicivirus every three years. But they also suggest that cats at a high risk of exposure to these diseases may benefit from more frequent vaccinations. Since vaccinating every three years does not agree with the current manufacturers' directions of vaccinating annually, when to vaccinate, and with what, must be a personal (and informed) choice for each cat owner. Consult with your veterinarian to determine what is best for your cat.

The noncore vaccines include feline leukemia (FeLV), feline infectious peritonitis (FIP), Bordetella, and Chlamydomphila. The AAFP recommends AGAINST FeLV vaccinations in adult totally indoor cats who have no exposure to other cats. It is suggested that all kittens, because they are most susceptible and their lifestyles may change, should receive an initial FeLV vaccination series. FIP and Giardia vaccinations are not recommended. The choice to use a Chlamydomphila vaccine is based upon the prevalence of the disease and husbandry conditions.

In general, modified live virus (MLV) vaccines are preferred over killed vaccines because they stimulate immunity faster and longer.

Vaccination Recommendations for Cats



Component	Class	Efficacy	Length of Immunity	Risk/Severity of Adverse Effects	Comments
Panleukopenia	Core	High	> 1 year	Low to Moderate	
Rhinotracheitis	Core	High; reduces severity and duration of disease, but does not prevent disease or the carrier state	> 1 year	Low: may see sneezing in cats given modified live vaccine	Use intranasal vaccine for faster protection
Calicivirus	Core	Variable; reduces severity and duration of disease, but does not prevent disease or the carrier state	> 1 year	Low: may see sneezing in cats given modified live vaccine	

Rabies	Core	High	Dependent upon type of vaccine	Low to moderate; Lower for recombinant vaccines	
Feline Leukemia	Recommended for all cats that live outside full or part time, or those living full time inside but with exposure to outside cats. Also suggested for all kittens.	Variable	Revaccinate annually for cats at risk	Vaccine-related sarcomas can develop with killed (adjuvanted) vaccines	Vaccination not recommended for cats with minimal or no risk, especially after 4 months of age; blood test prior to vaccination
Chlamydomphila	Noncore	Low; reduces severity and duration of disease, but does not prevent disease or the carrier state		High	Not recommended for cats at minimal or no risk
Feline Infectious Peritonitis	Noncore	Low			Not recommended
Bordetella	Noncore	Low	Short	May be more severe in kittens	
Giardia	Insufficient data to comment - not recommended				
Feline Immunodeficiency Virus	Insufficient data to comment - vaccinated cats should be permanently identified since they will likely have positive results if tested for FIV				

A possible vaccination schedule for the 'average' indoor house cat is shown below.

Cat Vaccination Schedule	
Age	Vaccination
6-7 weeks	Combination Vaccine*
10 weeks	Combination vaccine Chlamydomphila (Pneumonitis): include in combination vaccine where it is a concern.
12 weeks or older	Rabies: Given by your local veterinarian (age at vaccination may vary according to local law).

13 weeks	<p>Combination vaccine Chlamydophila (Pneumonitis): include in combination vaccine where it is a concern. Feline Leukemia (FeLV): for kittens at risk of exposure to feline leukemia virus.</p>
16 & 19 weeks	<p>Combination vaccine FeLV: for kittens at risk of exposure to feline leukemia virus.</p>
Adult (boosters)**	<p>Combination vaccine Chlamydophila (Pneumonitis): include in combination vaccine where it is a concern. FeLV: for cats at risk of exposure to feline leukemia virus. Rabies: Given by your local veterinarian (time interval between vaccinations may vary according to law).</p>
<p>*A combination vaccine includes feline distemper, rhinotracheitis, and calicivirus. Some may also include Chlamydophila. **According to the American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Association of Feline Practitioners, cats at low risk of disease exposure may not need to be boosted yearly for most diseases. Consult with your local veterinarian to determine the appropriate vaccination schedule for your cat. Remember, recommendations vary depending on the age, breed, and health status of the cat, the potential of the cat to be exposed to the disease, the type of vaccine, whether the cat is used for breeding, and the geographical area where the cat lives or may visit.</p>	