



The Scratching Post

Summer 2006

From the Kentwood Cat Clinic

Kitten Wellness Care

By Maria Berger DVM

Congratulations! You have a new addition to your family. A small, four-footed ball of purring fluff has wiggled its way into your heart. Now what? Like all children, kittens need regular trips to the doctor to prevent illness, and to help them grow into healthy adults.

Out of all the very important medical needs of growing kittens, the

most important is the need for a series of good, thorough, physical exams. In their first year, these little babies will experience all the physical growth that we humans go through in our first 15 years! It is imperative that they be checked periodically to be sure they are following the normal development for their species and breed. This is one of the many reasons we do a physical exam prior to any vaccinations.

All kittens need a blood test to check them for exposure to feline leukemia virus and feline immunodeficiency virus (feline AIDS). These are viruses that are passed to cats either through the birthing process or from direct contact with other cats. These viruses do not pass to people, and they cannot be passed to cats from other animals. Kittens/cats may carry the viruses for a long time in their bodies before they become ill. Since these diseases are ultimately fatal, it is important to know the status of your kitten **before** you bring it home and expose any of your resident cats to the newcomer.

Kittens, even those that remain inside, need a series of vaccinations to protect them from certain life threatening diseases: distemper, respiratory viruses, feline leukemia and rabies. These vaccines are started at approximately 8 weeks of age. Over a period of eight weeks the kitten must receive a series of three distemper, two leukemia and one rabies vaccines. The spacing of the vaccines is critical. To achieve the greatest protection against disease, the vaccine sets must be given every 3-4 weeks. If more than four weeks have passed between vaccinations, it is will necessary to restart the vaccine series.

It is also very important that you bring in a sample of your kitten's bowel movement to be checked for internal parasites. Parasites come in two forms—worms and microscopic organisms. They can be passed to kittens and cats in a variety of ways: directly from the mother cat through the placenta or through nursing, from hunting and eating insects and animals, from eating fleas while grooming, or through direct contact with contaminated soil. Unless a kitten happens to vomit up a worm for you, most of the time you will not know that parasites are present. At the veterinarian's office, the poop will be examined under a microscope to look for parasite eggs. Proper deworming medication can then be prescribed. Even if a kitten's stool sample does not show eggs, we will deworm them for a particular parasite called "roundworm". This parasite can be difficult to diagnose, and under certain circumstances it can be transmitted to people. A series of three dosages of roundworm dewormer is the current recommendation.

The information described above is what we consider the core of any young kitten wellness program. We will tailor our care to meet the specific needs of your feline friend. Sometimes it can seem a little intimidating to be taking on the responsibility of a new kitten; but remember, we are here to help. Please feel free to call if you have any questions about your new family member!

Do Inside Cats need to be vaccinated?

By Maria Berger, DVM

Even cats that remain inside can be at risk for exposure to infectious diseases. Even though we can prevent our cats from going outside, we cannot always prevent viruses from gaining entry into our homes.

Certain viruses, such as the virus that causes feline distemper, are very hardy and may live for months in the soil, grass, leaves or other surfaces. We can bring disease home to our cats on our shoes or clothing. Other viruses are passed through the air, and our cats may encounter them when we open doors or windows. Many of these diseases can result in severe illness or even death in an unvaccinated cat. Rabies is an always fatal disease that can be carried and transmitted by any mammal, including



bats. Since bats routinely find their way into peoples' homes, cats have ample opportunities to encounter them. I have spoken with one client who came home to her apartment to find a bat hanging on the wall, a few inches above her cat's litter pan! As rabies is also fatal to humans, our cats represent a first line of defense between us and infected wildlife. Feline leukemia is a fatal, viral disease of cats that is passed either from the mother cat to her kittens, or passed from cat to cat through contact with bodily fluids such as saliva, blood, or urine.

Since even cats that remain strictly inside may be faced with exposure to disease causing viruses, they should receive the protection offered by vaccination. The key to success is picking a vaccine protocol that reflects the lifestyle and needs of each cat as an individual. How we choose to vaccinate a kitten will be very different from the vaccines that we offer to a young adult that lives in an apartment building. As a general rule, all cats, regardless of whether they totally inside, or spend some of their time outdoors, should receive protection from rabies, distemper, and the more dangerous respiratory viruses. Kittens, one year olds, and adults that are exposed to other cats with unknown vaccine status should receive feline leukemia vaccine as well.

Once again, what vaccines should be given depends on the lifestyle of the individual cat. Beyond the kitten series of vaccines, and the first set of adult boosters, the veterinarians at Cat Clinic North will work with you to tailor a vaccine program to meet your pet's individual needs.



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Tech Tips

Introducing The New Kitten

By Lisa McKeiver LVT from CCN

After much thought, you have decided to add a new feline member to the family. Although cats normally do not live in social groups, they can form close attachments to other animals; many however, are content to live solitary lives. Pick a quiet time to bring the new family member home when you will have time to spend with the new cat, as well as the existing feline members. Holidays are not good times to bring home a new kitten. There is too much distraction and activity going on.



Some preparations need to be made before the exciting homecoming. Set up a room for the kitten with its own litter box, food and water, and a blanket to sleep on. Pick a neutral room, one that the other cats do not have a high desire to be in. Be sure to kitten proof the room, as well as the rest of the house.

Bring the kitten into his room and allow him some time to settle in. Put the food and water close to the door, so the other cats can smell him through the door and he can smell them, allowing them to get used to the scent of one another. Be sure to give the kitten lots of attention as he will be confined by himself, but don't forget the older cats, give them lots of attention so they do not feel as threatened by the new comer. After an appropriate quarantine period of 7-10 days, switch the bedding between the kitten and the other cats as another way for them to get used to each other's scents.

After the quarantine period, occasionally confine the other cats and allow the kitten to roam his new household so he can smell the other cats; this will also allow his scent will also get spread through the house. Then when he is confined again the other cats can smell him.

After exchanging scents for a couple days, start allowing the adult cats and the kitten to have supervised time together. By supervised time, have the kitten in a crate and let older cats see him through the door and the kitten to see them. Let them become acquainted on their own, don't try to force a relationship. A good idea is to have the kitten on a harness and leash so he is under control. Pet them and reward them when they are calm, do not reward them if they are being aggressive. There will be some hissing and arguments, but do

not become involved unless the older cats are becoming too aggressive. At that time you can spray them with water to distract them. Try to watch for early signs of aggression so you can be ready to interrupt them if necessary.

Gradually, the new kitten can be allowed in the household unsupervised when everyone has become used to him. You can put a bell on the youngster so you know where he is and can still be somewhat supervised. This will also prevent him surprising the other cats as they will know his whereabouts.

Most cats will at least learn to tolerate each other, even if they do not become best of friends, and some cats may take a while to adjust. Be prepared for it to take weeks to months, but don't give up. Many cats enjoy having a "pet" of their own. In the long run all the effort will be very rewarding for everyone.

What's New

Changing Vaccine Protocols

By Jessica Czederpiltz, DVM

Vaccine protocols have recently become a hot topic in veterinary medicine. For decades all animals received yearly vaccinations regardless of their health status and lifestyle. Vaccines have many benefits in terms of disease control, but they also rarely can result in reactions or tumors at the site of vaccination. In an effort to vaccine only where appropriate, the American Association Of Feline Practitioners and the American Animal Hospital Association have published guidelines with recommendations for pets based on their individual lifestyles (see article on vaccine protocols this issue).

With this changing protocol, it is also important to realize how essential the annual exam is for your pet. Even if vaccines are not due, an annual exam is a valuable way to pinpoint health problems and address them as early as possible for a happier, healthier pet!

Safety Tip Of The Month

Toilet Seats

By Maria Berger DVM

With a new little kitten in the house, keep the toilet seat down. If they jump up then, they won't fall in.





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Tech Tips

Vaccine Recommendations

By Lisa McKeiver, LVT from CCN

Kittens

Kittens receive 2-3 distemper vaccines, 3-4 weeks apart, depending on their age, the final vaccines being given at 16 weeks of age. They receive 2 feline leukemia, also 3-4 weeks apart. They are given a rabies vaccine no sooner than 12 weeks.

Indoor Adults

Distemper vaccine is boosted yearly. Feline leukemia (if given, depending on the cat's lifestyle, exposure etc.) is boosted yearly. Rabies is boosted every 1-3 years.

Outdoor Adults

Distemper and leukemia are boosted yearly, and rabies every 1-3 years.

Senior Indoor Cats

Depends on the cat's lifestyle. Updated on distemper every 3 years. Leukemia every 3 years depending on lifestyle. Rabies every 3 years. Ask one of our doctors for their recommendations.

Whats New

Antihistamines for Allergies

Jessica Czederpiltz DVM

Did you know that antihistamines can be useful for the control of allergies and itching in cats just like they can in people? The phenomenon of "itching" is very complex, and many substances play a part in the overall process that results in inflammation and a desire to scratch. Histamine is one of these substances and antihistamines are drugs which block their release.

There are many types of antihistamines available these days. Some have been around for many years (Chlorpheniramine) and have successfully been used to help treat allergies in cats, but occasionally have unwanted side effects such as sedation and bitter taste. More recently a new class of non-sedating antihistamines has become available (Allegra, Zyrtec, Claritin). The effectiveness of these new forms vary, but in many cases they can be helpful without the side effects of other types.

Most importantly prophylactic use of antihistamines in cats with known allergies can help control severe "outbreaks" of rash and skin infection that then require more serious treatment. Steroids are often needed for such outbreaks and they can have negative side effects - so anything that can be done to prevent their use is ideal!!! If your kitty suffers from allergies, ask your veterinarian if there is a form of antihistamine that would be right for them!



MAY CAT OF THE MONTH KAYLEE HOPE OOSTERBAAN

YEAH KITTENS! It is that time of year again. It is kitten season. So we decided to have a kitten be our May Cat of The Month, and Kaylee Hope Oosterbaan fit the bill perfectly. Kaylee's owner Ruth Oosterbaan wrote us such a great letter telling us Kaylee's story that we wanted to let her words speak for themselves.

When my precious orange and white cat Peanut passed away on March 15th, I was devastated by the loss. It is still hard, and I will always miss her. Around the time she was ill, one of my co-workers told me that her cat had a litter of kittens. The first time I went to visit them, a tiny little calico stumbled out of the cat bed toward me, and I knew I would have to take her when she was old enough.

I named her Kaylee Hope because she has a K shaped design on her head, and Hope because she is giving me hope after losing Peanut. Kaylee makes me laugh, because she has very large ears, just like her Mom.

I had set up a nice bed for her in the bathroom but she decided that she preferred to sleep on the hamper. Kaylee loves to wrestle with the stuffed animal "Peanut" my sister gave me. She likes to bite its tail and whiskers.

Kaylee is trying to make friends with the other cat in the house whose name is Dippy. No luck so far. I think she is confused about why Dippy hisses and growls at her. She is a very social cat and always wants to be around people, even when she is eating. She also enjoys attacking my feet under the covers and pounces on anything that moves. She loves climbing and jumping around and up and down the cat tower that I just got for her.

Kaylee is definitely giving me lots of hope and joy!!

Ruth Oosterbaan



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Vaccine Side Effects—What To Watch For

By Maria Berger, DVM

As shown in the previous article, vaccinations are an important part of keeping our cats happy and healthy. Vaccines today are very safe and the vast majority of vaccinated cats experience no other side effects than a night of extra sleepiness. In any population, however, there will be individuals that are sensitive to a certain vaccine or to vaccines in general. Knowing what signs and symptoms to watch for is the key to catching an adverse reaction to a vaccination.

Vaccine reactions fall into two categories: localized reactions and systemic reactions. Localized reactions take the form of a lump under the skin at the site where a vaccine was injected. They generally appear approximately 14 days after a vaccination, and seem to "pop up" overnight. These lumps are usually firm and non-painful when touched. Most will resolve in 6-8 weeks. If such a lump does not resolve within the two month time period, it should be biopsied and submitted to a laboratory for evaluation to make sure it is not a more dangerous type of lump, such as a tumor. It is important to report these lumps to the veterinarian's office and have them evaluated if they occur. In most cases, changing to a different vaccine manufacturer will prevent a reoccurrence of the problem.

Systemic vaccine reactions come in two varieties. Anaphylactic reactions occur within minutes of receiving a vaccination and is immediately life threatening. This is the same type of reaction that occurs in people who are very allergic to bee stings. The vaccine triggers a severe allergic reaction in the body. Immediate treatment with intravenous medications and fluids is needed to correct the situation. This is a very rare event, and in 13 years of practice I have only witnessed this reaction once. The second type of systemic reaction is the more common one, and is called a delayed hypersensitivity reaction. It usually occurs between two and twelve hours after receiving a vaccination, and can manifest with many different symptoms. The most common symptoms are vomiting, severe itchiness, or fever. Occasionally, a cat may show soreness in the leg that received the vaccine, or extreme lethargy lasting more than just the usual 12 hours. The signs may range from mild to severe, depending on the cat.

In the majority of these systemic reactions, medical intervention is needed to break the allergic response and help the pet to feel better at a faster rate. Injections of antihistamines and short acting steroid medications are the most common medicines used. Extra fluids may be given to prevent dehydration and to help lower a fever if it is present. Response to treatment is usually quick, and most of these cats will be back to their old selves within 24 hours. In these situations, we will not only change to a different vaccine manufacturer, but we will usually recommend giving no more than one vaccine at a time, and/or pre-medicating the cat with antihistamines/steroids prior to receiving their vaccinations(s).

Vaccine reactions can be scary, and thankfully they occur in a very small part of the feline population. Being aware of what to watch for

is they key to success in identifying those individual cats that will need special care when receiving routine vaccinations.

Things You Can Learn From Your Cat



Make the world your playground

Whenever you miss the sandbox, cover it up. Dragging a sock over it helps.

If you cant' get your way, Lay across the keyboard till you do.

When you are hungry, meow loudly so they feed you just to shut you up.

Always find a good patch of sun to nap in.

Nap often.

When in trouble, just purr and look cute.

Life is hard, and then you nap.

Curiosity never killed anything except maybe a few hours.

When in doubt, cop an attitude.

Variety is the spice of life. One day, ignore people; the next day, annoy them.

Climb your way to the top, that's why the curtains are there.

Make your mark in the world, or at least spray in each corner.

Always give generously; a bird or rodent left on the bed tells them "I Care"

When you have something important to say, try to say it in the dead of the night when you're "sure" everyone's sleeping. There's no better way to get the attention you deserve