# Vaccines & Vaccination Schedule for Cats & Kittens

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*

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 Chlamydophila. 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 Chlamydophila 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 | |



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| 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 |
| Chlamydophila | Noncore | Low; reduces severity and duration of disease, but does not prevent disesae or the carrier state | < 1 year | 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**<br>**Chlamydophila (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). |



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|---|---|
| 13 weeks | **Combination vaccine**<br>**Chlamydophila (Pneumonitis)**: include in combination vaccine where it is a concern.<br>**Feline Leukemia (FeLV)**: for kittens at risk of exposure to feline leukemia virus. |
| 16 & 19 weeks | **Combination vaccine**<br>**FeLV**: for kittens at risk of exposure to feline leukemia virus. |
| Adult (boosters)** | **Combination vaccine**<br>**Chlamydophila (Pneumonitis)**: include in combination vaccine where it is a concern.<br>**FeLV**: for cats at risk of exposure to feline leukemia virus.<br>**Rabies**: Given by your local veterinarian (time interval between vaccinations may vary according to law). |

*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 boostered 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.



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