

# Cat Vaccines: Protecting Your Feline Friend's Health

Vaccinations are one of the simplest and most effective ways to keep your cat healthy. They help prevent serious — and sometimes fatal — infectious diseases. Whether your cat lives strictly indoors or enjoys time outside, vaccines play a vital role in their long-term health and wellbeing.

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## Why Are Vaccines Important for Cats?

Vaccines work by preparing your cat's immune system to recognize and fight off specific viruses or bacteria before they can cause illness. Even indoor cats can be at risk — some viruses can travel through open windows, on your clothing, or from a newly adopted pet.

Regular vaccination helps protect not only your cat but also the wider cat community by reducing the spread of contagious diseases.

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## Core vs. Non-Core Vaccines

Vaccines are generally divided into two categories:

- **Core vaccines:** Recommended for **all cats**, regardless of lifestyle.
- **Non-core vaccines:** Recommended based on **your cat's risk factors**, such as outdoor access or living with other cats.

Your veterinarian will help tailor a vaccine schedule based on your cat's age, health, and lifestyle.

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## Core Vaccines for Cats

### 1. Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis (FVR)

**Cause:** Feline herpesvirus-1 (FHV-1)

**About the disease:** This virus affects the upper respiratory tract, eyes, and nose. Once infected, cats may carry the virus for life, with flare-ups during times of stress.

**Signs include:**

- Sneezing
- Nasal discharge
- Eye discharge or conjunctivitis
- Loss of appetite

**Vaccination helps** reduce the severity and frequency of flare-ups.

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## 2. Feline Calicivirus (FCV)

**Cause:** Feline calicivirus

**About the disease:** Another major cause of upper respiratory infections in cats. It can also cause painful mouth ulcers and, in severe cases, lameness or pneumonia.

**Signs include:**

- Sneezing and nasal discharge
- Mouth sores or drooling
- Fever
- Joint pain or limping

**Vaccination provides** strong protection and helps limit spread within multi-cat environments.

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## 3. Feline Panleukopenia (FPV)

**Cause:** Feline parvovirus

**About the disease:** A highly contagious and often fatal virus that attacks rapidly dividing cells, especially in the intestines and bone marrow.

**Signs include:**

- Severe vomiting and diarrhea
- Loss of appetite
- Lethargy

- Dehydration and collapse  
**Vaccination is extremely effective** and essential — even a single exposure can cause life-threatening illness, especially in kittens.
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## 4. Rabies

**Cause:** Rabies virus

**About the disease:** A fatal viral infection that affects the brain and nervous system. It can infect all mammals, including humans.

**Signs include:**

- Behavioral changes
  - Aggression or uncoordinated movement
  - Paralysis  
Even indoor cats should be vaccinated in case they escape or come into contact with a rabid animal. Vaccination against rabies is legally required for most international travel.
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## Non-Core Vaccine: Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)

**Cause:** Feline leukemia virus

**About the disease:** FeLV is spread through close contact, grooming, or bite wounds. It can cause immune system suppression, anemia, and cancer.

**Signs include:**

- Weight loss
- Poor coat condition
- Recurrent infections
- Pale gums  
**Vaccination is recommended** for kittens and for adult cats that go outdoors or live with other cats whose FeLV status is unknown. Even if your cat tests negative now, vaccination helps protect them from future exposure.

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## Vaccine Schedule

- **Kittens** usually start vaccines at **6–8 weeks old**, with boosters every **3–4 weeks** until about **16 weeks**.
- **Adult cats** receive boosters every **1–3 years**, depending on the vaccine type and lifestyle.  
Your veterinarian will create a personalized vaccine plan for your cat's needs.

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## After the Appointment

Most cats tolerate vaccines very well. Mild sleepiness or soreness at the injection site is normal for a day or two. If your cat experiences vomiting, facial swelling, or difficulty breathing, contact your veterinarian immediately — allergic reactions are rare but possible.

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## Keeping Your Cat Protected

Vaccines are a key part of preventive care, along with regular checkups, parasite control, and dental health. Staying up to date with vaccines gives your cat the best chance at a long, healthy, and happy life.