

## **Feline Vaccination Protocol**

It's much easier to prevent disease than to cure it. We are fortunate enough to have modern vaccines to prevent the major illnesses of our feline friends. Below are basic guidelines to feline vaccinations.

### **FVRCP:**

Known as the feline distemper vaccination, it is actually a 3 in 1 combination that protects against Panleukopenia (Distemper), Rhinotracheitis and Calicivirus. These are highly contagious diseases caused by viruses and are usually fatal in kittens. This vaccine is considered a "core vaccine" by the American Association of Feline Practitioners, even for cats who live 100% indoors. After the initial series, your pet receives a booster one year later and then every three years subsequently.

### **FELV:**

Known as the feline leukemia vaccination. Feline leukemia is caused by a virus and while it is not cancer, it causes severe disease symptoms and is almost always fatal. It can lead to tumor growth nearly anywhere on the body, as well as a variety of other symptoms. Infected cats are unable to resist other diseases and become fatally ill from associated infections. A test should be done before inoculations are given to detect if the cat harbors the disease. This can be done as early as 8 weeks. The leukemia vaccine is now considered a core vaccine for kittens including an initial series and booster 1 year later. After that, only cats who are not 100% indoors are vaccinated annually.

### **Rabies:**

Caused by a virus that attacks the brain, rabies is always fatal. The disease can be transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected animal. After the initial vaccination, subsequent inoculations are done annually, whether they are indoor or outdoor. It is required BY LAW for all pets to be vaccinated for Rabies and kept up to date on that vaccine.

Hopefully we have given you a basic understanding of what these vaccinations are and the importance of them. As always, if you have any questions regarding your pet feel free to call us and we'll be happy to advise you!

## **New Kitten Series**

### **~8 weeks of age:**

A physical exam of the kitten is performed, the first FVRCP vaccine is given, and a fecal (stool) sample is checked for internal parasites (Roundworms, Hookworms, Giardia etc.).

### **~12 weeks of age:**

A physical exam is performed, the second FVRCP inoculation is given and a fecal sample may be rechecked if your kitten's last sample was positive. A FELV (Leukemia Virus) and FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus) test is done at this time and, if negative, the first FELV inoculation may be given.

### **16+ weeks of age:**

A physical exam is performed and the final FVRCP in the kitten series is given once they are over 16 weeks of age. The second and final FELV in the kitten series may be given at this time or a Rabies vaccine. Each of these inoculations are effective for one year.

Usually, a maximum of two injections are given at a time to minimize risks, reactions, and poor immune system response.

### **5-6 months of age:**

This is the ideal time to have your female cat spayed, or your male cat neutered. The benefits far outweigh the risk of surgery. You can help your cat live a healthier, longer life.

Spaying a female eliminates the heat cycle, the possibility of pregnancy, and ends the crying and howling associated with a feline in heat. It also nearly eliminates the risk of mammary cancer (almost always malignant in cats).

Neutering a male is not cruel and it does not make a cat feel any less masculine. On the contrary, it makes him a much more desirable companion! It stops the mating drive so he will be less likely to roam or fight and it stops the marking of his territory by spraying foul smelling urine. Neutering also eliminates the risk of testicular tumors.

In addition to being the best for your companion's health, altering your cat also helps to control the pet overpopulation in this county. There are plenty of other good reasons to alter your pet. If you have any questions or reservations regarding this procedure, we strongly urge you to discuss them with one of our doctors or staff members!

## **Microchipping**

Prevent pet theft and loss by having your pet microchipped!

Microchipping is a painless procedure that helps to ensure the protection of your pet. The microchip itself is a small computer chip, about the size of a grain of rice. The chip is easily injected under the skin between the shoulder blades. This chip stores a number unique to your pet and can be read through a scanner passed over the skin. Newer microchips have the ability to read your pet's temperature when scanned!

Local pet stores, animal shelters and veterinary hospitals have scanners and use them to identify any unidentified animals that are brought in. When a pet has a microchip, they can easily be identified and quickly returned to their owner. Microchips are required to identify your pet for international travel.

Unfortunately, these microchips are NOT GPS tracking devices, they only hold an identification number that is then linked back to you, and the finder needs to call the company, your private information is not stored in the chip. The chip poses no health threat to your pet. Unlike tags and collars, which can fall off, the microchip is permanent. No one plans on losing a pet or having one stolen. Unfortunately, as many as 1 in 3 pets are lost, and only 1 in 10 are found.

After insertion, you will need to register your pet with HomeAgain Pet Recovery Service for a small one-time fee. Microchipping For more information, see [www.homeagain.com](http://www.homeagain.com)

## **My cat lives inside and seems healthy, why does it need a physical exam every year?**

Cats really should not go without a checkup for more than a year, even if they do not appear to be sick or injured. This is because going longer than one year without a routine vet exam could lead to a cat having an undiagnosed medical issue. Since advanced diseases and medical conditions are usually harder for vets to treat than when they are in the early stages, it is always better to be safe than sorry and just take cats to a vet checkup once a year.

### **What Happens at a Cat's Yearly Exam?**

At a year exam for your cat, your vet will:

- Weigh your cat; often one of the earliest signs of a problem is weight change!
- Take your cat's medical history and answer any owner questions
- Give your cat a physical exam. Things like heart murmurs, abnormalities in the eyes and ears etc. have the best prognosis when addressed in the early stages.
- Take blood, urine, and/or feces for early detection testing of kidney disease, parasites, infections etc.

- Give your cat vaccinations and other preventative care if they are due

Your vet will do these things to make sure that your cat is in good health and not developing an illness or medical condition. This is because medical conditions and diseases are often much easier to treat in the early stages. Vaccinations and other preventative care help prevent medical problems as well.

## All About Litter Boxes

Cats can be finicky about their bathroom habits, so keeping your cat's litter box up to their standards is very important. You don't need to teach your cat what to do with a litter box; instinct will generally take over. You *do* need to provide an acceptable, accessible litter box and show your cat where it is.

### How many litter boxes should I use?

**One litter box for each cat in the home plus one more, in different locations throughout your home.** This ensures that if one cat is being bullied by another, they will still feel safe using the litter box. It's not possible to designate a personal litter box for each cat in your household; cats use any litter box that's available. That means a cat may occasionally refuse to use a litter box after another cat has been in it, so you'll need to keep each litter box clean.

### What type of litter box should I use?

When cats eliminate, they release scents that can lead to unwanted attention from other cats or potential predators. They want to feel safe, which means being able to see their surroundings and view potential "escape" routes, and they want the area to be clean, which means it needs to be regularly scooped.

**Boxes should be large enough for the cat to easily turn around in without touching the sides of the box, low enough that they can easily get in and out and placed in a quiet but accessible area of the home away from food and water bowls.** Try a few types of boxes and litter to find which your cat prefers.

### Covered and Self-Cleaning Boxes

Although covered boxes can decrease the amount of litter that flies from the box when your cat buries their business, there are some potential downsides. An "out of sight, out of mind" box is easy to forget about, which may lead to a dirty box with odors trapped inside that's unappealing to your cat. Covered boxes can also be difficult for larger cats to turn around and position themselves in and may lead to easier ambushes by other cats on exit. Ultimately, if your cat doesn't like a covered box, they won't use it.

There are also a wide variety of self-cleaning litter boxes available that offer convenience and automation in cleaning your cat's litter. Buyer beware: Some of these features may prevent a cat from wanting to use their litter box, so if your cat is used to a traditional box, it's best to stick to what they know.

### What type of litter should I use?

Cats were originally desert animals, so most cats prefer fine-grained litter similar to sand. The most popular commercial litter is traditional clay litter, scooping/clumping litter, crystal-based/silica gel litter and plant-derived/biodegradable litter. A cat who rejects all commercial litter may like sand; a

former outdoor cat may like soil mixed with their regular litter. Once you find a litter your cat likes, stick with it. Switching types of litter could result in your cat not using the litter box.

Note that while many people use scented litter or air freshener to mask litter box odors, these odors can be off-putting to cats. A thin layer of baking soda placed on the bottom of the box will help absorb odors without repelling your cat.

### Litter depth

Most cats won't use litter that's more than about two to three inches deep. Some long-haired cats prefer less litter and a smooth, slick surface, such as the bottom of the box. Adding extra litter won't reduce the amount of cleaning necessary for a litter box.

In addition, litter box liners can be convenient, but cats often get their claws caught in these liners, which can lead them to avoid using the box.

### Where should I place my cat's litter box?

Most people tend to place the litter box in an out-of-the-way spot to minimize odor and prevent cat litter from being tracked throughout the house. But if the litter box ends up in the basement next to a creepy appliance or on a cold cement floor, your cat may be less than pleased, so you may have to compromise.

- Keep the litter box in a spot that feels "safe" to your cat but is also convenient. If the box is too hard to get to, especially for a kitten or an elderly cat, they may just not use it.
- Avoid placing litter boxes next to noisy or heat-radiating appliances, like the furnace or the washing machine. Noises can make a cat nervous, while heat from a dryer or furnace can magnify the litter box smell, which could make them stay away from the litter box.
- Put the box far away from their food and water bowls.
- Place at least one litter box on each level of your house. That way your cat has options if access to their primary box is blocked (e.g., the basement door is closed, or your dinner party has them holed up in the bedroom.) If you have more than one cat, provide litter boxes in several locations so that one cat can't ambush another cat using the litter box.
- If you keep the litter box in a closet or a bathroom, be sure the door is wedged open from both sides to prevent your cat from being trapped inside or locked out. Depending on the location, you might consider adding a pet door.

### How often should I clean my cat's litter box?

**Scoop waste daily.** How often you replace the litter depends on the number of cats you have, the number of litter boxes and the type of litter you use. Twice a week is a general guideline for replacing clay litter, but depending on your circumstances, you may need to replace it every other day or only once a week. If you clean the litter box daily, you might only need to change clumping litter every two weeks. If you notice an odor or if much of the litter is wet or clumped, it's time for a change. Scrub the box every time you change the litter. Use mild dish detergent to clean it, as products with ammonia or citrus oils can turn a cat off, and some cleaning products are toxic to cats.

### What if my cat suddenly stops using the litter box?

If your cat begins to go to the bathroom outside the litter box, your first call should always be to your veterinarian. Many medical conditions can cause a change in a cat's litter box habits. If your veterinarian examines your cat and performs lab work which leads to a clean bill of health, your cat may have a behavior problem that needs to be solved.

## The Five Pillars of Enrichment for Cats

When discussing the "five pillars of enrichment" in the context of animal welfare, particularly for cats, the most common interpretation refers to: a safe place, opportunity for play and predatory behavior, positive social interaction, sensory stimulation, and access to multiple separated key environmental resources; essentially providing a balanced environment that caters to a cat's natural instincts and needs across physical, mental, and social aspects.

Breaking this down, it means that cats need several things to be happy and comfortable, and to avoid behaviors related to anxiety or stress.

1. **Physical space** – Cats like comfortable, elevated places from where they can safely observe the environment and have an easy escape, so they don't feel trapped. They particularly need a safe space to sleep, away from any "threats".
2. **Social interaction** – Although commonly known as "independent" animals, cats greatly value contact with their humans and with select other cats (if they consider them part of their social group. Cats are in the same social group ONLY if they sleep touching each other and groom each other regularly). Consistent and positive interactions with humans, respecting the cat's boundaries and communication cues, are critical to a cat's happiness.
3. **Access to resources** – Felines often like to have several small meals throughout the day and to drink fresh water from running sources. An excellent way to stimulate cats is to divide the recommended daily feeding into several bowls and containers and interactive toys scattered over the available area and to have a water fountain, or a couple bowls of water that are cleaned regularly. Most cats don't like to drink water that is too close to their food bowls so make sure there is plenty of access to fresh water. Access to different areas for eating, sleeping, grooming, and playing allows the cat to choose where they want to be depending on their needs.
4. **Elimination area** – Cats are very clean animals, and they don't like to eliminate in unclean places, nor to share litter boxes. The ideal solution is to provide a litter box per cat and one extra, all placed in different rooms, in quiet places and with more than one point of exit, so they don't feel trapped. Cats also often prefer open, spacious boxes and fine, soft sand.
5. **Activity** – Indoor cats redirect their predatory and exploratory instinct to play activities if they have the opportunity to do so. Opportunities to engage in activities that mimic hunting, like chasing toys or using puzzle feeders, to exercise their natural instincts. Engaging multiple senses through sights, sounds, smells, textures, and tastes, like providing perches near windows with bird feeders or offering different textured toys. We recommend dedicating 10 minutes per day to stimulating each cat with toys that

simulate prey movement and to always provide other toys for individual play. Placing scratch poles (or likewise) near cat resting places and at the entry/exit points allows cats to mark their territory without destroying furniture.

For senior cats or cats with mobility disorders, or post-surgical recoveries, we recommend:

- Create safe, comfortable and easy access areas in the main divisions of the house, to avoid social isolation. Placing ramps or steps to make high places more accessible is also a good strategy.
- Raise the bowls of food and water and place several feeding stations, so as not to force the animals on long journeys.
- Place horizontal scratchers, which reduce the lumbar load
- Provide litter boxes with easy entry/exit systems, so the cat doesn't have to jump or cross partitions.

**Some helpful websites with great information for cat owners.**

<https://www.thedrakecenter.com/services/blog/five-pillars-healthy-feline-environmental-enrichment>

<https://catfriendly.com/cat-friendly-homes/what-your-cat-needs-to-feel-secure/>

<https://indoorpet.osu.edu/cats>

## Play Behavior in Cats

Cats are intelligent and agile creatures. During play, a kitten or an adult cat makes full use of its surroundings to provide itself with mental and physical challenges. Particularly attracted to moving objects, cats investigate new things on both ground level and elevated surfaces. Play allows a young animal to practice important life skills without adult consequences. Running, jumping, hiding, and other playful antics could be invaluable later when hunting for food or escaping an enemy.

Play gives you an opportunity to teach your cat acceptable behavior. **Avoid forms of play that encourage a cat's aggressiveness.** No cat should learn that it is acceptable and fun to pounce on, grip, bite or scratch a person's clothing or body. Such innocent fun as chasing wiggling fingers or toes under the bedcovers could lead to problems later. **The target of a cat's playful attention should be directed away from its human playmate.** Introduce a variety of toys for your cat to chase, such as light-weight balls or toys suspended from string or wire.

### Undesirable Nighttime Activity

Juvenile cats are normally very active, sometimes overwhelming their owners. Young cats tend to be more active during evening and nighttime hours and frequently disturb their owners' sleep. **Cats are naturally nocturnal (more active at night) because they have adapted to hunting in darkness.**

If your cat is satisfied with the amount of attention and exercise it gets before your bedtime, chances are good that its schedule of peak activity will gradually match yours. If your young cat tends to nap during the day when you are home, wake him or her up to play.

Though cats frequently seem to amuse themselves when there is no available playmate, they often thrive on additional social interaction with you. To increase your chances of sleeping through the night, play appropriate games with your cat and engage him or her in other activities they might enjoy, such as brushing, before retiring to bed. Provide a variety of attractive toys to entertain your cat so that he or she is less likely to awaken you.

Once you have gone to bed, consistently ignore your cat's attempts to get your attention and they will eventually stop disturbing you.

### Preventing Damage During Play



“Kitten-proof” your home by removing or preventing access to valuable or hazardous objects that will attract your cat. Apply screens on windows to prevent accidental falls or intentional escapes. It is normal for cats to investigate elevated surfaces (tabletops, mantels) in their territory. Your valuables may be accidentally destroyed in such exploration, or the cat may destroy objects through playful mischief.

If your cat damages items in certain areas, it may be necessary to close the door to that room. Another option to discourage your cat from returning to an area is to make it an unpleasant place to visit. Strips of sticky tape placed sticky side up are an unpleasant surprise for cats to step on, as are cookie sheets filled with water. Another great tool is a motion activity air sprayer to keep cats off of counters, stoves or unsafe spaces. If your cat is destructive or harmful with its claws during play, keep them well trimmed to avoid damage. Nail caps or soft claws can also help keep your cat’s nails from being too sharp!

## **Destructiveness in Cats**

### Destructiveness Related to Territorial Marking

A cat claims its territory by rubbing its scent onto objects, by leaving scratch marks on selected surfaces, and by eliminating outside its litterbox. These territorial markings alert other cats to their presence. Newly arrived cats typically stake a claim by covering other cats’ markings with their own. Territorial marking is a normal behavior in cats. It becomes undesirable, however, when it is performed inside your home and results in destruction.

A cat may become anxious when it is introduced to a new territory, detects an intruder or rival in its territory, has an underlying medical disorder, or has its daily routine altered. Under stressful conditions, marking patterns may accelerate. Many cat owners tolerate a certain amount of destructiveness, particularly when the damage is minimal or directed at an object of little value. An owner’s tolerance may be tried, however, if the destructiveness becomes excessive or involves an object of value.

### Encouraging Use of a Scratch Post

In addition to its function in territorial marking, scratching also serves to remove the outer layer of each claw, made blunt by wear. Cats frequently scratch soon after awaking and not far from their place of rest. The act of scratching, which typically begins by reaching forward with the forepaws fully extended, is important to stretch a cat’s muscles. **Some cats prefer to stretch using horizontal surfaces, while others prefer vertical ones. Cats also show individual preference for surface texture.**

Early in life, kittens should be encouraged to use a scratch post. Many kittens are immediately attracted to the scratch post, but some require coaxing. It may be helpful to place a suspended toy or treat on top of the post, encouraging your cat to reach up and contact the post. You can also sprinkle some catnip around and on the post to encourage use. The most important considerations, however, are the post’s location, length (should be long enough for the cat to reach up to almost full height) position (horizontal or vertical) and surface texture.

**In choosing the location of the scratch post, remember that cats tend to scratch near their favorite resting places.** Watch your kitten to see where it is naturally inclined to scratch and immediately place a scratch post at that location. It is probably not worthwhile to punish your cat for inappropriate scratching unless it is recent in onset. Shouting at him or her or making a noise to frighten them away is likely to be ineffective and may make things worse. In response to your punishment, an anxious cat is even more likely to mark its territory. Your cat could learn to avoid you or simply discover that they can scratch that location unbothered when you are not nearby.

Similarly, covering the undesirable scratching place with a foul-tasting substance may only drive the animal to use another surface that may be even less desirable to you. A more reliable tactic is to retrain your cat to scratch appropriate surfaces by making them more attractive. This is called Positive Reinforcement and is the only appropriate type of training for our pets.

If your cat's scratching is already causing damage to your property, there are several approaches to resolving the problem. First, identify your cat's preferences for location and surface quality. Are these close to its favorite resting place? Are they vertical, inclined or horizontal? Are they rough or smooth, carpeted or not? Second, block access to the undesirable spot by covering it with plastic sheeting or aluminum foil. Third, select one or more new scratching posts that incorporate your cat's preferences. By trial and error, you may find one that is particularly alluring to your pet.

**The American Animal Hospital Association and Bridgewater Veterinary Hospital strongly oppose elective declawing** and believe it is our obligation to provide educational tools and guidance for effective alternative training programs. Declawing is not just removal of the claw; it is an amputation of the third bone in each toe. There are inherent risks and complications with any surgical procedure including, but not limited to anesthetic complications, analgesic side effects, infection, and pain. In addition, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does NOT list declawing as a means of preventing disease in either healthy or immunocompromised individuals.

### Destruction of Houseplants

Cats occasionally indulge a craving for plants. While the reason is not clearly understood, it may be normal for cats to ingest dietary fiber. In some instances, plant chewing may indicate an underlying medical disorder. If your cat shows an increased tendency to chew on your houseplants (particularly if it has never done so previously) and shows any loss of condition suggesting a health problem, call us.

Hanging plants or waving branches may provide entertainment, becoming a form of play for cats. Cats may be particularly attracted to the odor, taste and texture of certain plants. Catnip is well known for its mildly intoxicating but benign effect on cats. Some cats dig in the soil of potted plants because of simple curiosity or because they instinctively are drawn to eliminate in soil.

Please be sure to not keep ANY toxic plants in your house, including any form of Lilies. Any part of a Lily plant can be deadly toxic to cats. If you think your cat has eaten part of a plant that may be toxic, please call the Pet Poison Helpline at [\(855\) 764-7661](tel:855-764-7661)

## TOOTHBRUSHING

We know, it is tough sometimes to remember to floss and rinse your own teeth let alone your pet's teeth! However, daily tooth brushing is one of the best preventative health actions you can take for your pet.

### Getting Started

Apply a small amount of pet toothpaste to your finger and gently rub it along the outside of your kitten's gums & teeth. Never use human toothpaste, as the ingredients can be toxic to your pet when swallowed. The most important area to focus on is the gumline (the crevice where the gums meet the teeth). This is where bacteria and food mix to form plaque. Make sure to get the back upper and lower teeth and gum areas. You do NOT need to brush the inside of the teeth; dogs and cats have an abrasive tongue which takes care of this brushing. Once your pet is okay with this, gradually introduce a piece of gauze with the toothpaste on it. Place it over your finger and rub the outside of the teeth & gums.

### Should I Use a Toothbrush?

When your pet tolerates the gauze, try a finger toothbrush or a brush specially designed for pets. If your cat doesn't tolerate the toothbrush that's OKAY. Gauze alone will provide a good level of plaque removal. Animal toothpaste is mostly for flavor, it's really about the mechanical action of you brushing along the gumline! The entire process should take less than a minute. If your pet continues to resist, try gently wrapping him or her in a large bath towel with only his head sticking out. Above all, avoid stress and keep sessions short and positive.