

shorter lives than we do, this is the equivalent of us having a booster every 5 or 6 years, which is a lot longer than most human vaccines will last. These boosters should be given every year.

Are these vaccines safe?

Some vaccinations can make your cat a bit quiet for a day or so while his or her immune system is working hard to produce more antibodies. However, this is quite harmless. Occasionally cats who are already fighting off another illness will be ill for a few days, as the vaccine gives their immune system more work to do, but this is actually very rare. We vaccinate thousands of cats each year, and are happy that these reactions are very uncommon.

Although individual reactions can happen, they rarely last more than a day or so, are very uncommon, and are much less risk than that of your cat getting some of these potentially very serious diseases.

If you want to discuss your cat's vaccinations, please ask at the surgery

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VACCINATING CATS



This is one of a series of information handouts written by our vets and nurses for our clients and their pets

What are vaccinations?

Vaccines are injections which can be given to any animal, including us, in order to bring about some immune protection to a particular virus or bacteria which cause disease. Should your pet then come across these viruses or bacteria, he or she is already immune and will fight off the disease.

Which diseases can we protect against in cats?

Feline Leukaemia Virus - this is a very serious disease which can affect any cat. The virus is found mainly in saliva and other body fluids & hence biting and licking are important means of spread. Once in the body, it can affect most parts to cause illnesses such as abscesses, gum disease, eye problems and cancer. Sadly, these illnesses always progress, and eventually cause death. It has been estimated that 3/4 of all cats will come across the virus at some stage in their lives. Fortunately, many cats can fight it off on their own, but those that do not and are not vaccinated succumb to the diseases. 85% will then die within three years.

Cat flu - this is a group of diseases caused by several different viruses. It is very similar to the nasty flu viruses we can get. It causes your cat to have runny eyes, a snotty nose and often ulcers in the mouth. A high temperature as well means that your cat will definitely not feel like eating and the weakness this can cause can become very serious. In very young or old cats, pneumonia and death may even occur. As in the human form, there are many different strains and some are more serious than others. The viruses are spread rapidly by sneezing or by discharges being transmitted via food bowls and the like. In many cases the cats never completely get rid of the virus and they are carriers who snuffle for the rest of their lives, and spread virus on to other cats. Because this disease spreads quickly in an enclosed area, all catteries insist that cats are vaccinated before entering their premises. The viruses are now much less common than they used to be, and fortunately vaccination has reduced the amount of cat flu by a great deal.

Chlamydia - this is an organism that lives in the conjunctiva. It causes a nasty conjunctivitis with sore and runny eyes, that can look quite mild, but is actually very painful. Approximately 1 in 3 cases of conjunctivitis are caused by Chlamydia. Treatment involves eye drops and antibiotic tablets for up to two months, which is often easier said than done! This is not available in all vaccines.

Feline enteritis a viral disease which causes a nasty diarrhoea and vomiting which is so devastating that it usually also causes death. This used to be a common problem in cats, but is fortunately rarely seen nowadays as years of vaccination has almost eradicated it.

Fortunately, the vaccine which protects against all four of these diseases is now available in one syringe - and therefore one needle! - it is now the vaccine which we use as standard in our Practice.

How often do cats need these vaccines?

When they first have a vaccination, cats need to have two injections with about three weeks between them. The first injection allows your cat's immune system to prepare the template for the antibodies that are needed for protection. The second injection then makes millions of these antibodies, so that they are ready to combat the disease. We recommend starting the injections at 9 weeks old at the earliest. Kittens younger than this have some protection already from their mum's milk. Over the next few months the protection slowly falls, and after about one year another vaccination is needed (the booster) to create more antibodies. As cats live much