

## Vaccines For Your Cat

***We ask that you review the following information prior to discussing which vaccinations you elect to have administered to your cat. While we can help provide you with appropriate information to weigh the risks and benefits, it is ultimately your decision as to which vaccines you wish to have your cat receive. Please feel free to ask the doctors or technicians any questions you may have.***

**Core Vaccines** are those vaccines which every cat should receive, regardless of exposure to other cats. These include **distemper (feline panleukopenia), calicivirus and herpesvirus (feline viral rhinotracheitis)**. These are combined in the "feline distemper shot", given as a series of vaccinations as a kitten then an "adult booster" a year later. Although this vaccine is labeled to be given every year, evidence supports that the protection lasts longer. The current recommendation for adult cats is a distemper booster every 3 years after the first adult booster. **Rabies** is also given to every cat. Kittens get one dose, then a booster a year later. Depending on the rabies vaccination used, the rabies booster is given every 1 to 3 years as an adult. (See the discussion about the Purevax rabies vaccine below.)

**Non-Core Vaccines** are those vaccines which may or may not be necessary since the diseases they prevent occur sporadically or are more common in specific circumstances. At Fort Drum, we offer the feline leukemia vaccine as an optional vaccine for cats at risk.

- **Feline Leukemia (FeLV)** is a deadly virus that infects cats worldwide. It causes a variety of symptoms including cancers, anemia, and immunosuppression, leading to infections with other diseases. Early in the course of the disease, cats can have no symptoms for months to years, but can be infective to other cats. It cannot be transmitted to people and has no relation to leukemias that happen in people. However, cats that are immunosuppressed with the feline leukemia virus that develop secondary infections can sometimes pass those *other* infections onto people. Cats pick up the virus from direct contact with another infected cat, usually through grooming, biting, or sharing food or water dishes. It can also be passed from a mother cat to her kittens. Although young cats and kittens are most susceptible to the virus, adult cats can be infected as well.

**The feline leukemia vaccine is recommended for cats and kittens who will go outdoors, potentially contacting other cats who may be infected.** It is also recommended for cats in multiple-cat households

where the introduction of new cats is common, and for cats living with an FeLV-infected cat. **All cats should be tested for FeLV prior to vaccination**, since the vaccine will not provide protection if your cat has already been exposed. All new cats should be tested prior to bringing them into your household. If you have a kitten and are not sure it will be kept indoors, you should have the vaccine until you know for sure. The vaccine is given as a series of 2 shots, 3-4 weeks apart, and then an annual booster.

**About Feline Leukemia Testing:** All cats should be tested at least once in their lives for FeLV (feline leukemia) and FIV (feline AIDs). This is commonly referred to as the “combo test”. Both viruses are contagious to other cats, and if we know that your cat is positive we can make recommendations for his/her health as well as recommendations to reduce the risk of infection to other cats around him/her. It can take 3-4 months from the time of exposure before the infection will be detected by the test, so in general, cats coming from unknown backgrounds should be tested prior to bringing them into a household. If they will be housed indoors and not vaccinated, they should be retested 3-4 months later. Kittens should have an initial test, then retested when they are over 6 months old.

**Risks of vaccination:** in general, vaccines may cause localized pain or swelling, low grade transient fever, allergic reactions such as swelling of lips and eyelids, and mild lethargy. With any vaccine, anaphylaxis (a potentially fatal hypersensitivity reaction) may occur. In cats, this is generally seen as severe vomiting and diarrhea or wheezing, usually within half an hour of receiving the vaccine. If this occurs, let us know immediately. While there is no direct cause and effect relationship between vaccinations and certain immune-mediated diseases, this continues to be investigated. It is normal to feel a small lump where the vaccine was given, but it should disappear. Let us know if it is still there a month after vaccination. In cats, there is another rare but serious reaction called a **Vaccine-Associated Sarcoma**. This is estimated to occur in 1-2 out of 10,000 cats, where a cancerous lump develops soon after or even several years after a vaccination, injection, or even trauma (not associated with a vaccine). The reason is unclear. There is a newer brand of rabies vaccine for cats called “Purevax” that *may* be less likely to stimulate a cancerous lump. The Purevax rabies vaccine needs to be boosted yearly—it is not a 3 year vaccine—but it is considered by many experts to be safer for your cat than the older rabies vaccine as well as being highly effective. We recommend this vaccine instead of the older 3 year rabies vaccine.