

DUNDAS
WEST
ANIMAL
HOSPITAL



Welcome to the Family!

Everything you need to know for your
kitten's happiest, healthiest start.



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WELCOME!

We want to congratulate you on the addition of your new kitten.

Welcoming a cat into your life is an incredibly rewarding experience, and with it comes new responsibilities. At Dundas West Animal Hospital, we're dedicated to supporting the health and well-being of your newest furry family member. We're honoured that you've chosen us to be part of your kitten's journey.

We've created this document as a roadmap and resource for new kitten parents—full of helpful tips, guidance, and important information to give your little one the healthiest start.

If you have any questions about your kitten's health, please don't hesitate to contact our hospital. Our entire team is happy and ready to support you.

**Monday**

8:00am - 8:00pm

Tuesday

8:00am - 8:00pm

Wednesday

8:00am - 8:00pm

Thursday

8:00am - 8:00pm

Friday

8:00am - 8:00pm

Saturday

8:00am - 2:30pm

Sunday

Closed



The Kitten Pathway

A step-by-step guide through your kittens first year of care.



Initial Kitten Appointment

Visit One: Initial Kitten Appointment

At your kitten's very first appointment, we'll perform a full nose-to-tail exam to ensure they're starting off healthy and strong. Your kitten will receive their first FVRCP vaccine to protect against common feline viruses, and we'll collect a stool sample to screen for intestinal parasites. We'll also begin the deworming process with NexGard Combo. This is a great time to discuss pet insurance, go over your kitten information package, and consider starting FortiFlora—a supplement that supports immunity and digestive health throughout kittenhood.



Second Kitten Appointment

Visit Two

At your kitten's second visit, we'll continue building their immunity with a booster FVRCP vaccine and chat about whether the Feline Leukemia vaccine is right for them. We'll also review their deworming schedule and discuss giving another dose of NexGard Combo, if needed. If a second fecal test is required, we'll confirm that too. This visit is also the perfect time for a nail trim demo—we're happy to show you how to keep those little claws in check at home!



Third Kitten Appointment

Visit Three

At your kitten's third wellness visit—usually around 16 weeks of age—we'll give the final FVRCP booster to complete their core vaccine series. If your kitten is receiving the Feline Leukemia vaccine, they'll get their second dose at this appointment. We'll also demonstrate how to clean your kitten's ears at home and chat about continuing parasite prevention based on seasonal and lifestyle risks.



Final Kitten Appointment

Visit Four

At your kitten's final wellness visit—typically two weeks after their third appointment—they'll receive their Rabies vaccine, which is legally required and essential for their safety. We'll also discuss spay/neuter timing based on our clinic's protocol, provide estimates, and talk about the benefits of pre-anesthetic bloodwork. This is a great time to consider microchipping for permanent identification, and we'll continue the conversation around ongoing parasite prevention based on your kitten's lifestyle and the season.

What's Next?

We'll plan to see your kitten again one year after their Rabies vaccine for their annual exam and adult vaccine boosters. At that visit, the veterinarian will tailor a vaccine schedule based on your cat's lifestyle and ongoing needs to help keep them healthy for years to come.

The Kitten Vaccine Adventure:

Why So Many Visits?

Born with a Boost

At birth, your kitten gets some natural protection from mom. But as that fades, they'll need help building their own immune system — and that's where vaccines come in.

Why Boosters?

Mom's early protection is great — but it can block vaccines from working if we give them too soon. Boosters help us hit the sweet spot when her protection fades and your kittens immunity kicks in.

What Are We Protecting Against?

Think of these vaccines like shields:

- **FVRCP** – Defends against Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, and Panleukopenia.
- **FeLV** – Defends against Feline Leukemia Virus. FeLV is a highly contagious retrovirus that can cause a variety of serious health problems in cats, including cancer and immune deficiency.
- **Rabies** – Defends against Rabies. Legally required and lifesaving. Cats are more commonly affected by Rabies than their canine counterparts.



The Worm War:

Keeping Your Kitten Parasite-Free

Do all kittens have worms?

Many kittens are infested with parasites at a young age, or pick them up through their mother's *milk* — even if they seem perfectly healthy. That's why **routine deworming and fecal testing** are an important part of your kittens early care.



[Information on
Nexgard Combo —
Click Here](#)

How do we check for worms?

We'll ask you to bring in a **stool sample** so we can test for common parasites like **roundworms, hookworms, giardia, coccidia, and more**. Two types of testing are performed:

- **Fecal Floatation:** Looks for parasite eggs under the microscope
- **Fecal Antigen Testing:** Detects parasitic DNA even before eggs are present

What's the deworming process?

Since parasite eggs aren't visible to the naked eye, we follow a **routine deworming schedule** for all kittens. Medications are given **multiple times** to catch any developing worms and stop the life cycle.

Some parasites can also affect humans — so regular deworming helps keep the **whole household safe**. This is particularly important in households with young children or the elderly.

What deworming medication will my kitten get?

Your kitten will likely receive:

- **NexGard Combo** — Kills fleas and ticks; prevents heartworm disease; and treats and controls roundworms, hookworms, and tapeworms

Additional medications may be recommended depending on fecal test results.

 Have questions?

We'll help you build the best parasite prevention plan for your kittens lifestyle — just ask at your next visit!



Fleas, Ticks & Tiny Hitchhikers:

What Kitten Parents Need to Know

How Does My Kitten Get Fleas?

Fleas are small but mighty and can come from **parks, sidewalks, wildlife, other pets, or even your home**. Their life cycle includes eggs, larvae, pupae, and adults—and they love warm, cozy spots like carpets and pet beds.

Even if you don't see fleas, they might still be hiding. Eggs are nearly invisible, and pupae can stay dormant for months until the conditions are just right.

? How Do I Treat Fleas?

We recommend at least **three months of NexGard Combo**, given once every 30 days. This ensures you're killing newly hatching fleas as they emerge. If fleas are detected after July, you will have to treat for 3 months again in April of the following year. All pets in the household need to be treated.

? Don't Forget the House!

Fleas don't just live on pets—they live in your home too. To help stop the cycle:

- Wash your kittens bedding
- Vacuum carpets, furniture & favorite spots regularly
- Empty the vacuum bag right away
- Repeat weekly during treatment

? Why Do I Still See Fleas?

Seeing fleas after the first treatment is normal. The medication kills adult fleas, but new ones may still hatch from the environment. Stick with treatment for at least three full months for complete control, treat all pets in the household, and remember that depending on the season, repeating treatment may be needed.

What About Ticks?

Ticks might look like insects, but they're actually **arachnids**, related to spiders, scorpions, and mites. Unlike insects (which have six legs and antennae), **adult ticks have eight legs and no antennae**. They're parasites that **feed on the blood** of animals — including your kitten — and humans.

? How Ticks Find Your Kittens

Ticks **don't jump or fly** — they wait on grass, leaves, or shrubs for your pet to walk by, then climb aboard. Some can even crawl several feet toward a warm body. They can 'hitchhike' on other animals, or on humans. So even indoor cats should be on tick prevention. Ticks are active in the spring, summer and fall as well as any mild winter days.

? How Do I Remove a Tick?

Use a Tick Twister or similar tool to grasp and gently twist the tick until it releases.

- ✓ Wear gloves
- ✓ Avoid home remedies (like Vaseline or heat)
- ✓ Contact your veterinarian for next steps - a blood test or further treatment may be recommended.



Did You Know!

Ticks don't hibernate! If the temperature is above 0°C, ticks can be active—even in the middle of winter. That's why we recommend year-round prevention for your pets.

Fueling Your Kittens

Big Adventure:

A Guide to Growing Up Strong

Why Nutrition Matters for Your Growing Kitten

Proper nutrition is *essential* for healthy development during kittenhood — a time when your cat's bones, muscles, organs, and immune system are rapidly growing. Choosing the right diet now sets the foundation for lifelong health, helping to prevent growth-related problems and ensuring your kitten reaches their full potential.

Feeding Your Kitten

Mealtime is one of the most exciting parts of your kitten's day — and a great opportunity to build a strong bond while supporting their health through proper nutrition.

During the first year of life, kittens experience rapid growth and development, which is why feeding a complete and balanced kitten-specific diet is so important. Kitten food provides the extra calories, protein, and nutrients needed to support strong bones, muscle growth, a healthy immune system, and proper development.

Be sure to measure food portions to help your kitten maintain a healthy weight, and always provide fresh, clean water. Avoid feeding milk (which can cause diarrhea), bones (which can splinter), or table scraps (which can lead to picky eating and weight issues).

A proper balanced diet in kittens includes a combination of wet ('canned') and dry ('kibble') food. Cats on a dry-only diet are associated with higher incidences of obesity, diabetes, and urinary tract problems including crystals and bladder stones.

We understand that some pet owners prefer to feed homemade or raw food diets, and we respect your commitment to your pet's nutrition. If you're considering one of these options, we're happy to have an open discussion about how to do so as safely as possible. It's important to know that raw and home-prepared diets can carry increased risks, such as bacterial infections (like Salmonella) and nutritional imbalances if not carefully formulated. We recommend working closely with your veterinarian to ensure your pet's diet is both safe and complete.



Feeding Tips

- Smaller, more frequent meals are better for your cat. Ideally, 3 meals daily.
- Ensure you feed a combination of canned and dry food. For the average 5kg cat, about ¼ cup of dry food and 156g of canned food is sufficient.
- Keep food and water bowls in a quiet, low-traffic area—away from the litter box.
- Say your kitten's name at mealtime to help with name recognition.
- Use a mat under dishes to make cleanup easier.

Nutrition Milestones

- 7 months: Most permanent teeth are in, but your kitten still needs kitten food.
- 12 months: Your kitten is officially an adult and can transition to adult food. It is recommended to do this slowly, over a period of 3-4 weeks.

Why Hydration Matters for Your Kitten

Water plays a vital role in your kitten's overall health. It supports everything from organ function and digestion to nutrient absorption and circulation. Staying properly hydrated also helps reduce the risk of urinary stones and supports the kidneys in flushing out toxins.

Cats can be picky about how they drink, so it's important to experiment and find what works best for your kitten. Some prefer still water in a wide, shallow dish, while others are drawn to running water from a pet fountain. No matter how they drink it, fresh, clean water should always be available.

Encouraging good hydration habits early on helps support lifelong urinary and kidney health.

Most cats are 'poor' drinkers, and only drink when they are behind on their hydration (like if they are being fed all dry food). Most cats 'eat' their water, that is, they get it via their wet food. The #1 best thing you can do to promote moisture intake in your kitten is to feed more canned, less dry food. Mix water into the canned food (about 1 tbsp [15ml] per 85g [3oz]) is usually well-tolerated.

Still Unsure?

We're always happy to help with food recommendations tailored to your kitten. Feel free to ask us about:

- Choosing an appropriate diet
- Transitioning to adult food at the right time



Say Cheese!

Caring for Your Kittens Smile

Start Early, Smile Often!

Kitten breath may be adorable now — but just like people, cats need regular dental care to stay healthy throughout their lives. Starting dental routines early helps prevent problems down the road and makes your kitten more comfortable with handling.



[VOHC Approved Cat Products — Click Here](#)

Teething and Your Kitten

Just like human babies, kittens go through a teething process as they grow. Here's what to expect:

Teething Timeline

- 3–4 weeks: Baby teeth (also called milk teeth) begin to emerge.
- 6–8 weeks: Most kittens have a full set of 26 baby teeth.
- 3–4 months: Baby teeth start falling out, replaced by permanent adult teeth.
- 6 months: Most kittens have all 30 adult teeth in place.

Why Kitten Dental Health Matters

- Dental disease can start as early as 1 year of age
- Bacteria from plaque can affect the heart, liver, and kidneys
- Preventing dental issues means less pain, fewer extractions, and lower long-term costs

What You Can Do Now

1. Get your kitten used to mouth handling

Start by gently lifting their lips and touching their teeth and gums with your finger. Do this daily — pair it with treats and praise!

2. Introduce a toothbrush, if possible

Use a soft-bristled pet toothbrush or finger brush and start with just water or a dab of pet-safe toothpaste (never human toothpaste!).

3. MAXI/GUARD Oral Cleansing Wipes

An easy, effective way to support your pet's dental health! These taste-free wipes use a unique zinc formulation to fight plaque, reduce inflammation, and neutralize mouth odors. Textured for gentle cleaning without irritating gums, they're a great option for pets who aren't fans of brushing.

4. Make brushing a habit, if possible

Aim for **daily brushing**, even if it's just a few teeth at a time. Consistency matters more than perfection.

4. Dental Cleanings

Understand that most cats will need dental care with a Comprehensive Oral Cleaning and Health Assessment/possible extractions several times throughout their life. Some oral disease simply cannot be prevented in cats.

Teething Tips

Signs Your Kitten May Be Teething

- Decreased appetite
- Excessive chewing
- Sore, red, or slightly bleeding gums
- Pawing at the mouth
- Increased irritability

How You Can Help

- Offer soft food to make eating more comfortable.
- Provide chilled toys to soothe sore gums.
- Encourage interactive play to help distract from discomfort.
- Give plenty of safe chew toys to satisfy the urge to chew.

Other Ways To Help Their Teeth

Offer safe dental chews and toys

- Look for products with the VOHC seal (Veterinary Oral Health Council), which meet standards for plaque and tartar control.

Try dental diets (if recommended by your vet)

- Some kibble is specially shaped to help reduce buildup.



The Importance of Pet Insurance

Peace of Mind for Life's Unexpected Moments

Bringing a new kitten into your life is an exciting journey full of love, play, and discovery. Along with the joys of kittenhood, it's important to prepare for the unexpected — and that's where pet insurance comes in.

Why Consider Pet Insurance?

Veterinary care in Canada is not subsidized or covered by provincial health insurance plans like OHIP. That means you are fully responsible for the cost of any care your pet may need — from vaccines and wellness checks to emergency surgeries or chronic disease management.

Pet insurance can help you:

- Afford emergency and unexpected care
- Focus on what's best for your pet, not your budget
- Spread out costs rather than paying out-of-pocket all at once
- Gain peace of mind during stressful times

When Should You Sign Up?

The best time to get pet insurance is when your kitten is young and healthy. Most insurance companies do not cover pre-existing conditions, so enrolling early ensures your pet is covered before any issues arise.

Some insurance providers offer free trials for new kitten — ask our team about what options may be available during your first visits.

What Does Pet Insurance Cover?

Coverage varies depending on the provider and the plan you choose. Most companies offer plans that include:

- Accident coverage (e.g., broken bones, ingestion of foreign objects)
- Illness coverage (e.g., infections, cancer, chronic diseases)
- Diagnostic testing, hospitalization, and surgery
- Medications and treatments
- Optional wellness or dental add-ons

Things to Consider

When choosing a plan, consider:

- Monthly premiums vs. out-of-pocket costs
- Deductible and co-pay amounts
- Whether you want illness + accident or wellness coverage too
- How claims are submitted and how quickly they are reimbursed

We recommend comparing providers and choosing one that best fits your lifestyle, budget, and the breed-specific risks for your pet.

Popular Insurance Providers in Canada

Some of the most commonly used pet insurance companies in Ontario include:

- Trupanion
- Petsecure
- OVMA Pet Health Insurance
- Desjardins Pet Insurance
- Fetch by The Dodo
- Pets Plus Us

We do not recommend one specific provider, but we are happy to share insights and help you review options.

Not Ready for Insurance? Consider a Vet Savings Plan

If pet insurance isn't the right fit, we strongly encourage setting aside a dedicated pet emergency fund. A savings plan can still help you prepare for surprise expenses and reduce stress when care is needed.

Have questions?

We're always here to help you understand your options and find what works best for your family.

Your kitten deserves the best care — and you deserve peace of mind. 🐾💙

Insurance Provider	Accident & Illness Coverage	Wellness Add-On	Waiting Period	Direct Vet Pay Option	Notable Features
Trupanion	✓ Yes	✗ No	5–30 days	✓ Yes (with approval)	No payout limits, lifetime deductible per condition
Petsecure	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	48 hours – 14 days	✗ No	Canadian-based, multi-level plans
Pets Plus Us	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	48 hours – 14 days	✗ No	Blue Ribbon Benefits (pet health helpline, grief counselling)
OVMA Insurance	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	48 hours – 14 days	✗ No	Endorsed by Ontario Veterinary Medical Association
Fetch by The Dodo	✓ Yes	✗ No	15 days	✗ No	Holistic care included (acupuncture, physio)
Desjardins	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	48 hours – 14 days	✗ No	Multi-pet discounts available

⚠️ This chart is a general overview. Coverage, exclusions, and pricing vary by provider. Be sure to read each policy's terms and conditions carefully before enrolling.

Emergency Clinic Information

Animal Health Partners - Lakeshore

Address: 806 Southdown Rd, Mississauga, ON L5J 2Y4

Phone: 905-858-6767

Main Intersection: Royal Windsor Drive and Southdown Road

Hours: 24h

Veterinary Specialties: Emergency services, neurology, ICU, internal medicine, medical imaging, surgery, dentistry and oral surgery, and anesthesiology

Animal Health Partners-North York

Address: 1 Scarsdale Rd, North York

Phone: 416-380-7400

Main intersection: Leslie St and York Mills Rd (Between Leslie St and Don Mills Rd)

Hours: 24h

Veterinary Specialties: Emergency services, neurology, ICU, internal medicine, medical imaging, surgery, cardiology and anesthesiology

Central Toronto Veterinary Referral Emergency Clinic

Address: 1051 Eglinton Ave West

Phone: 416-784-4444

Main intersection: Eglinton Ave W and Allen Rd (between Allen Rd and Bathurst)

Hours: 24h

Veterinary Specialties: internal medicine, oncology, diagnostic imaging and surgery

King Animal Hospital

Address: 1265-19th Sideroad, King City, Ontario

Phone: 1-888-622-7345

Main intersection: Dufferin St. and 19th Sideroad

Hours: 8-am-8pm for patient intake (MUST CALL BEFORE ARRIVING! Walk-ins not accepted)

Veterinary Specialties: Surgery, Rehabilitation, Neurology, Ophthalmology, Oncology, Dermatology, Diagnostic Imaging

Mississauga Oakville Veterinary Emergency Hospital

Address: 2285 Bristol Circle, Oakville

Phone: 905-829-9444

Main intersection: Winston Churchill Blvd and the QEW

Hours: 24h

Veterinary Specialties: Anesthesiology, cardiology, clinical pathology, critical care, dentistry, dermatology, internal medicine, neurology/MRI, oncology, ophthalmology, rehabilitation and surgery

Toronto Veterinary Emergency Hospital

Address: 21 Rolark Dr

Phone: 416-247-8387

Main intersection: Birchmount Rd and Ellesmere Rd (east end)

Hours: 24h

Veterinary Specialties: Anesthesia, critical care, diagnostic imaging, internal medicine, neurology, oncology, surgery and emergency service

Veterinary Emergency Clinic

Address: 920 Yonge St, suite 117

Phone: 416-920-2002

Main intersection: Yonge and Davenport

Hours: 24h

Veterinary Specialties: Anesthesia, cardiology, dentistry, dermatology, emergency and ICU, I-131 radioiodine treatment, imaging and diagnostics, internal medicine, neurology, oncology, ophthalmology, surgery, and rehabilitation

Veterinary Emergency Hospital of West Toronto

Address: 755 Queensway E, Mississauga

Phone: 416-239-3453

Main intersection: Queensway East and Cawthra Rd (Take Cawthra exit from QEW)

Hours: 24h

Veterinary Specialties: Surgery, ophthalmology and emergency services



APPENDICES

Curious about what those vaccines are really protecting your kitten from? Want to understand more about the creepy crawlies we're preventing with dewormers and parasite prevention? This section is for you! We've included extra info on common parasites, vaccine-preventable diseases, and why staying on schedule is so important for your kittens health.

Understanding Vaccines

Protecting Your Kitten Against Serious Illnesses

What Does FVRCP Protect Against?

1. Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis (FVR)

- What is it?
 - Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis is a highly contagious upper respiratory infection caused by feline herpesvirus type-1 (FHV-1). It's one of the most common causes of sneezing, nasal discharge, and eye infections in cats. Once infected, a cat becomes a carrier for life, with the virus lying dormant and potentially reactivating during times of stress or illness.
- Signs to Watch For:
 - Sneezing and nasal congestion
 - Discharge from the nose or eyes (watery to thick and yellow/green)
 - Red or inflamed eyes (conjunctivitis)
 - Lethargy, fever, or reduced appetite
 - In severe cases: corneal ulcers or chronic eye conditions
- How it Spreads:
 - Through direct contact with infected cats or contaminated items (bedding, bowls, hands). It spreads through saliva, nasal, and eye secretions, and can remain infectious on moist surfaces for hours.
- Treatment:
 - There is no cure for the virus, but supportive care can reduce symptoms and prevent complications. Treatment may include antiviral or antibiotic medications, eye drops, probiotics, appetite stimulants, and sometimes hospitalization for severe cases. The virus is not transmissible to humans or other animal species.

2. Feline Calicivirus (FCV)

- What is it?
 - Feline Calicivirus is a highly contagious virus and a common cause of upper respiratory illness and oral ulcers in cats. It can also lead to painful lameness and—in rare cases—a severe, life-threatening form of the disease that affects multiple organs.
- Signs to Watch For:
 - Sneezing, nasal congestion, and eye discharge
 - Painful ulcers on the tongue, gums, lips, or nose
 - Drooling or difficulty eating
 - Fever, lethargy, and reduced appetite
 - Lameness (especially in kittens)
 - In rare cases: facial swelling, jaundice, and severe systemic illness
- How it Spreads:
 - Through direct contact with an infected cat's saliva, eye or nasal discharge. The virus can also spread via contaminated objects (bowls, toys, litterboxes) and even hands or clothing. It may remain infectious in the environment for up to a week.
- Treatment:
 - There is no cure, but most cases are managed with supportive care, including hydration, nutritional support, medications to manage symptoms, and antibiotics to treat secondary infections. Severe cases may require hospitalization. Appetite stimulants or antivirals may also be used in some cases.



3. Feline Panleukopenia (FPL) – Also known as feline distemper

- What is it?
 - Feline Panleukopenia is a highly contagious and often life-threatening viral disease caused by the feline parvovirus. It attacks rapidly dividing cells, especially in the bone marrow and gastrointestinal tract, leading to a dangerously low white blood cell count and severe immune suppression.
- Signs to Watch For:
 - Lethargy or sudden collapse
 - Vomiting and diarrhea (often with blood)
 - Dehydration and weight loss
 - Rough, dull coat
 - Discharge from the eyes and nose
 - In some kittens: sudden death without prior symptoms
- How it Spreads:
 - FPL is shed in all bodily fluids, especially feces. It spreads through direct contact with an infected cat or indirectly via contaminated objects (dishes, litter boxes, clothing, shoes). The virus is extremely hardy and can survive in the environment for a year or more.
- Treatment:
 - There is no cure, but aggressive supportive care can be life-saving. Treatment includes IV fluids, anti-nausea medications, antibiotics to fight secondary infections, and intensive nursing care. Early intervention is critical for survival.

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 - Treatment:
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-

What Does FeLV Protect Against?

1. Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)

- What is it?
 - Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) is a contagious virus that affects a cat's immune system and blood-forming tissues. It can lead to cancer (leukemia, lymphoma), immune suppression, and anemia, among other serious illnesses. FeLV is specific to cats and does not affect people or other animal species.
- Signs to Watch For:
 - Weight loss, poor appetite, or chronic infections
 - Pale gums or other signs of anemia
 - Persistent fever or enlarged lymph nodes
 - Lethargy or general decline in health
 - In some cases: vomiting, diarrhea, neurological signs, or eye disease
 - Some infected cats may show no symptoms for months or years

- How it Spreads:
 - FeLV is spread through close contact—typically by saliva (mutual grooming, shared food/water bowls), nasal secretions, or bite wounds. It can also be passed from a mother cat to her kittens. The virus doesn't survive long outside the body, so direct contact is usually required.
 - Types of Infection:
 - Not every exposed cat becomes permanently infected.
 - Abortive infection: The cat clears the virus completely.
 - Regressive infection: The virus is mostly suppressed but remains hidden in the body and may resurface.
 - Progressive infection: The virus spreads through the body, and the cat becomes persistently infected and contagious to others.
 - Treatment:
 - There is no cure for FeLV, but supportive care can help manage symptoms and secondary infections. Treatment may include antibiotics, immune support, fluids, or antiviral medications. Sadly, most cats with progressive FeLV-related disease will decline over time, and many require humane euthanasia due to poor quality of life.
-

What Does the Rabies Vaccine Protect Against?

1. Rabies

- What is it?
 - Rabies is one of the most serious viral diseases known and is found worldwide—including in North America. It affects all warm-blooded animals, including cats and people. Once symptoms appear, rabies is almost always fatal. Because it is zoonotic (transmissible to humans), rabies is a public health concern and is regulated by law in many areas.
- Signs to Watch For:
 - After an incubation period (typically 3–8 weeks in cats), rabies progresses through three distinct stages:
 - Initial Phase (1–3 days):
 - Sudden change in behavior (quiet cats may become agitated; social cats may become withdrawn)
 - Increased vocalization or nervousness
 - Pupil dilation
 - Excitative or “Furious” Stage (Next 1–7 days):
 - Extreme agitation, aggression, or restlessness
 - Attacks on people, other animals, or inanimate objects
 - Muscle spasms and drooling due to inability to swallow
 - Not all cats display this phase
 - Paralytic or “Dumb” Stage (Final 2–4 days):
 - Progressive paralysis, especially in the throat and facial muscles
 - Drooling or “foaming” at the mouth
 - Coma and death from respiratory failure
- How it Spreads:
 - Rabies spreads through saliva, usually via a bite
 - In North America, bats, raccoons, foxes, skunks, and unvaccinated pets are common carriers
 - The virus travels through the nervous system to the brain, then to the salivary glands, where it becomes contagious
 - The virus does not survive long outside the body
- Incubation Period:
 - Typically 3 to 8 weeks in cats
 - Can range from 10 days to over a year
 - Bites closer to the brain or spinal cord lead to faster onset of symptoms
- Treatment:
 - There is no treatment for rabies once symptoms appear
 - Suspected cases must be quarantined immediately and reported to public health authorities
 - Unvaccinated cats that bite a person may be subject to long-term quarantine or euthanasia depending on local laws
 - Vaccinated cats that are exposed may receive a booster and short-term quarantine as directed by local regulations

Know Your Kitten's Parasite Risks

Common Parasites in Kittens

Roundworms

Roundworms are one of the most common intestinal parasites in cats—especially kittens. These long, spaghetti-like worms live freely in the intestines and can cause **pot-bellied appearance, vomiting, diarrhea, poor growth, and dull coat condition** in young cats. Severe infections can be life-threatening to kittens.

Kittens often get roundworms from **their mother's milk**, while older cats can become infected by eating contaminated prey or coming into contact with roundworm eggs in the environment.

Diagnosis is done through a **fecal test**, but adult worms may also be seen in vomit or stool. Treatment is **safe and effective**, though multiple deworming doses are needed to eliminate all life stages. Starting a deworming routine early—and continuing with **monthly parasite prevention**—is the best way to keep your cat protected.

Roundworms can also pose a **health risk to humans**, particularly children, so practicing good hygiene and regularly cleaning litter boxes and outdoor areas is essential.

Hookworms

Hookworms are small intestinal parasites that attach to the lining of the intestines and feed on blood. Though tiny in size, they can cause **anemia, black tarry stool, weight loss, and poor coat condition**—especially in kittens.

Cats become infected by **ingesting larvae** from contaminated soil or through skin contact (like walking on infected ground and grooming their feet). Hookworm larvae can survive in the environment for weeks to months, making reinfection possible.

Diagnosis is usually made through a fecal test, and treatment involves multiple doses of deworming medication to clear both adult worms and developing larvae.

Prevention includes keeping litter boxes clean, using **monthly parasite prevention**, and starting deworming early in kittenhood. While feline hookworms don't infect people internally, the larvae **can burrow into human skin**, causing a condition called **cutaneous larval migrans**—so good hygiene and proper feces disposal are essential.

Whipworms

Whipworms are intestinal parasites that live in the large intestine and cecum, causing irritation that can lead to **watery diarrhea, weight loss, and general illness**—especially in heavy infections. Though once rare in North America, **whipworm cases in cats are on the rise**.

Cats become infected by ingesting microscopic whipworm eggs from contaminated environments. These hardy eggs can survive for years, making reinfection common. Diagnosis can be tricky, as eggs are shed inconsistently and may not show up on every fecal test. Treatment requires **multiple doses of deworming medication**, and regular parasite prevention is key to keeping whipworms at bay. While the risk to humans is extremely low, keeping your cat protected helps ensure a healthier home for everyone.

Tapeworms

Tapeworms are flat, segmented worms that live in the small intestine. The most common type in cats, *Dipylidium caninum*, is spread when a cat ingests an infected **flea**—usually while grooming. Other types of tapeworms can come from hunting and eating small prey like rodents or birds.

Most often, tapeworm infection is discovered when owners see **small, rice-like segments** near the cat's rear or in the litter box. While tapeworms don't usually cause major health issues, heavy infestations can lead to **weight loss or digestive upset**, especially in kittens.

Treatment is **simple and effective**, typically given as a pill or injection by your veterinarian. Because fleas play a key role in the tapeworm life cycle, **consistent flea prevention is essential** to avoid reinfection.

Although rare, **humans can contract certain types of tapeworms**, especially children in environments with poor hygiene. Regular parasite prevention and good litter box habits go a long way in protecting your whole household.

An underestimated risk with serious consequences—even for indoor cats.

What is it?

Heartworm disease is caused by a blood-borne parasite called *Dirofilaria immitis*. These worms live in the heart, lungs, and nearby blood vessels, causing inflammation and potentially fatal damage to a cat's cardiovascular and respiratory systems. While heartworms are more common in dogs, cats are still at risk, and in some cases, heartworm disease can lead to sudden death—even in indoor cats.

Cats are less suitable hosts for heartworms, which means infections often involve fewer worms—but even a single worm can cause serious, irreversible illness.

How Do Cats Get Heartworm?

Heartworms are spread by mosquitoes—not through contact with other pets. When a mosquito bites an infected animal, it can carry heartworm larvae and transmit them to your cat. The larvae then migrate to the lungs and heart, where even immature worms can trigger serious inflammation and breathing issues, known as **Heartworm Associated Respiratory Disease (HARD)**.

Importantly, **up to one-third of infected cats are indoor-only, making year-round prevention essential for all cats.**

Signs to Watch For

Heartworm symptoms in cats can vary widely. In some cases, the first sign is sudden collapse or death. In others, the signs may be more subtle and mimic asthma or other respiratory illnesses.

- Coughing or wheezing
- Rapid or labored breathing
- Vomiting or loss of appetite
- Weight loss or lethargy
- Collapse or sudden death
- Fluid around the lungs in severe cases

Because cats typically carry only a few worms, or sometimes only immature ones, the signs of illness are not always tied to the number of worms present—which makes early detection even more difficult.

Diagnosing Heartworm in Cats

Unlike in dogs, no single test is reliable for detecting heartworm disease in cats. Diagnosis usually involves a combination of:

- Blood tests (antigen and antibody)
- X-rays to assess the heart and lungs
- Ultrasound (echocardiogram) to look for visible worms
- CBC and eosinophil count to check for immune response
- Clinical signs and history

Unfortunately, many cats may not test positive on all available tests, even if infected—making diagnosis a challenge. Your vet may recommend follow-up testing over time if heartworm is suspected.

Treatment

There is no approved or safe drug treatment to eliminate heartworms in cats. The medication used for dogs is too dangerous for cats and can cause fatal complications. Treatment focuses on supportive care:

- Corticosteroids (like prednisone) to reduce inflammation
- Oxygen therapy for breathing difficulty
- Symptom management (e.g., appetite support, anti-nausea meds)
- In extreme cases, surgical removal of worms may be attempted, though this is risky and not widely available

Some cats may survive the infection with supportive care as the worms eventually die, but the process can take two to four years, and complications can arise at any time.

Prevention Is Key

Because heartworm disease in cats is difficult to detect, impossible to cure safely, and potentially fatal, prevention is absolutely essential. Monthly heartworm preventives are safe, easy, and highly effective. Even indoor cats should be on year-round heartworm prevention, as mosquitoes can easily enter your home and infect your pet.



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