

# VACCINATION OF CATS

by Dr. Kathy-Ann Leon DVM

According to veterinary protocols kittens should be vaccinated beginning at 6 weeks, at 2-4 week intervals to 16 weeks of age or older with the combination vaccine for feline herpesvirus, calicivirus and parvovirus. All other vaccines are given based on assessment of the diseases of risk based on location and individual cat.



The combination vaccine covers:

- **Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis (Herpesvirus)** – An upper respiratory disease that affects most if not all kittens from 3 to 12 weeks. Symptoms usually involve the eyes, nose and throat and include eyes that may be swollen and shut with thick discharge, thick nasal discharges and sneezing. Most cats recover with tender care but the infection usually stays latent in the body and can be passed to the next generation.
- **Calicivirus** – Another upper respiratory disease of cats. Calicivirus can look exactly like FVR or one may also see severe ulceration of the mouth and tongue. These signs will cause the cat to drool excessively as the ulcers are very painful. The infection can be treated with medication, but animals may become carriers of the infection and pass it to the next generation.
- **Panleukopenia** – This is feline parvovirus infection and is marked by vomiting and diarrhoea in an infected cat. This disease is often fatal as kittens cannot survive the severe dehydration and depletion of their immune system. Aggressive fluid and antibiotic therapy is necessary for treatment and even then, recovery cannot be guaranteed.



Others include:

- **Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)** vaccine - Feleuk is a contagious disease spread from cat to cat via shared water bowls and communal grooming. Usually there are no symptoms until eventually, the disease begins to cause leukemia/ lymphoma in the cat later in life. Signs of disease are non-specific: not eating, lethargic, weight loss, blindness.
- **Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)** vaccine – FIV is a contagious disease spread from cat to cat most commonly through biting. Aggressive, male, outdoor cats are usually the most at risk. The virus causes signs similar to AIDS in humans.

Your veterinarian may suggest an FIV/FeLV test to determine the status of your pet. There is no cure for either disease, and neither can infect humans.

Currently, cat vaccines are not available in Jamaica.