

## Feline diseases, parasites, vaccines, altering

**Just like children, kittens are susceptible to a variety of diseases.** While their immune system is building its' own antibodies, their mothers' original antibodies are waning in their systems; leaving them very vulnerable to diseases. Most issues can be overcome with mild antibiotics but a few others hide and take months to incubate before they come out.

If your vet suspects something, the first thing you should do is a total feline health check and a CBC (complete blood count). The test consists of about 25 elements which will show elevations in certain areas. This type of whole blood profile test should give your vet a good idea of what may be wrong. The lab work will cost between \$130.00 and \$180.00; depending on the area you live.

Many diseases may not manifest in kittens immediately, and some cannot be screened for until they are older. Your vet can draw conclusions from certain panel elevations on tests. However, it's crucial to pause there unless you want to incur significant and very often, unnecessary vet costs. Despite the best intentions, vets may recommend extensive tests that may not change the outcome. Carefully assess the results and situation. Research from the Royal Canin Canadian Board of Veterinarians indicates that 20% or 1 in 5 kittens born may not survive their first year; with FIP and Leukemia being major causes. It's important to consider this when making decisions about your kitten's health. Unfortunately, in some cases, the odds are against us, and not all kittens will live a full life. While vets play a crucial role, they cannot perform miracles. Based on test results, and evidence before you and your vet, it may come down to a very painful and heart wrenching decision you need to make. **ALWAYS put the best interest of your kitten or cat first, and do what is best for them, and their comfort; not yours. Don't let them languish in a horrible, painful last few days or weeks, if all avenues for a recovery have been exhausted.**

### GIARDIA AND COCCIDIA

Giardia and coccidia are similar in appearance and symptoms. They are micro-organisms, single-cell protozoan parasites that cause bouts of diarrhea or very loose stool sometimes containing fresh blood in it, which is usually at the end of the stool. At times the symptoms are so slight they can go unnoticed after a kitten or cat covers their feces. Both are common parasites. It is believed that almost all cats will become infected with them at some point in their lifetime (FN#1, Royal Cannin Board of Vets). These parasites are the same, or very similar to drinking bad water in Mexico, or getting "beaver fever" from a stream or lake when camping.

Albon is commonly used for coccidia, fenbendazole or metronidazole for giardia. After an initial treatment, a fecal test can be "clear" but both can harbor in the intestinal tract and may not be excreted on the day of testing. Both can be stubborn and may need a second or even a third treatment. Eggs can be excreted back into the environment at any time through feces. After a day or two of treatment, the best is to change the litter and wash/disinfect the litter box with bleach. In the Spring, due to warming weather, the eggs can rapidly mature. Coccidia can live year-round in a heated house.

Rural areas near streams and marshes are great breeding grounds for these organisms. Fresh grass clippings and leaves that stick to your shoes, flies and bird droppings can all bring giardia and coccidia into your house. Dogs running in the yard, and children playing outside, garden work, even stepping on a "slug line" are all threats to introduce them into your home. Butterflies, moths, birds, toads, frogs, turtles, gnats all carry something that can get tracked into your house. The more wildlife around you, the greater your chances of some kinds of parasites ready to invade.

Visual signs can vary from animal to animal and adult cats may show little to no clinical signs, or they may have one bout of diarrhea every few months, then return to normal. Adult cats can live years or their entire lives with these organisms. In kittens, it is common to see the clinical signs of diarrhea with or without blood in it. Mortality is uncommon, but kittens can get dehydrated very quickly from the diarrhea, so loose stool is serious enough to warrant a trip to the vet. Use a 1 to 10 mix of bleach and water to disinfect the litter box and/or environment.

In the Northeast, giardia is very common, and is more of a nuisance disease. If you do notice something, get it checked. It is common practice when you take your kitten to the vet for them to ask for a stool sample for testing. This is fine when cats are young, but when they are older, if you do not suspect anything, you can refuse. It's a great money maker for the vet. Testing should cost between \$30.00 to \$45.00. The medications for either one should run between \$20.00 to \$30.00. Bring your health booklet with you to make notations in it of when a test or treatment was done.

## **FLEAS AND TICKS**

Fleas and ticks are not only a threat to your kitten, but to you as well. The season usually starts in the spring but can be year-round, even under snow cover. It's quite easy to bring them into your home. They can hitchhike on your clothing, kids, dogs, shoes, packages, or firewood. Fleas are also capable of carrying Lyme disease and about another dozen associated diseases. The best treatment is prevention.

Flea baths with Dawn dishwashing liquid are recommended for young kittens up to 12 weeks of age who are too small or young for spot-on chemical treatments on the back of the neck, or chemical flea collars. Use the original Dawn in the blue bottle. Fill your sink with about 5" of **LUKEWARM** water, grab your kitten by the scruff of the neck, and **BACK** it into the water. Using a **PLASTIC** tupperware container get the kitten wet from the neck down. **DO NOT USE GLASS!** Carefully wet around the eyes, ears, chin, cheeks and top of the head. Take the kitten out of the water and lather it up starting around the head area. Use a clock and time it. Keep the kitten lathered up for a full 5 minutes; 10 is better. During this wait time, you can wrap the kitten in a towel. After 10 minutes, unwrap and you will see dead and dying fleas that got trapped in the soap bubbles and died. Back the kitten up on the counter and back it into the sink of water. Using the plastic bowl give the kitten a good rinsing, starting at the head and going down to the tail. Towel dry. **Do NOT** use a hair dryer. Keep the kitten warm for the next 24 hours. Some products like Frontline, Advantage or Revolution can be used from 8 weeks old, and 2 pounds. **READ ALL INSTRUCTIONS FIRST BEFORE APPLICATION AND BE SURE OF THE APPROPRIATE AGE/WEIGHT FOR USE.** Do not use any Hartz, Seargants, or other cheap products, or any household products. **Do NOT use any flea collars or products with PYRETHRIN, or products labelled for dogs or other animals. Some of these products can kill your kitten.**

If you have any questions regarding a product, **contact your vet first, NOT** the manufacturer who wants you to buy their product. Revivalanimal.com, Lambertvetsupply.com, and Chewy.com sell these products for a lot less than your vet or PetSmart. Only purchase them after you have checked with your vet and know they are safe for your kitten/cat.

## **HERPES VIRUS AND EYE INFECTIONS**

It's estimated that up to 90% of ALL cats have either been exposed to, have, or are carriers of the herpes virus, simply known as FHV. It is estimated that up to 80% of humans either have or have been exposed to herpes and get occasional flare-ups like cold sores. Herpes can remain dormant for years in felines; just as in humans. This virus can survive in the environment for about a week, and it's possible to bring it home just by going to a pet store. It appears in kittens as runny, goopy eyes, sometimes sealed shut, along with possible runny nose and sneezing. Feline herpes is similar to human herpes in

that it is more of a nuisance disease, but can be easily controlled. The best is to catch it early. L-lysine is excellent at combating this virus. The virus needs arginine in the system to replicate. Lysin interferes and interrupts the arginine uptake. Many people use lysine also.

Since herpes is so common and widespread, lysine is available in many forms for felines. You can however use the human form of lysine. I have used Spring Valley L-Lysine 500 mg per tablet from Walmart. The **250 tablet jar** is about \$5.50. I grind the whole jar to a fine powder in my Magic Bullet. You may need to pull out the chunks and re-grind them. Pate varieties are best for mixing lysine, or any other medication. Years ago, while I went on a vacation and left my cattery in the hands of an experienced pet sitter, my **WHOLE CATTERY came down with herpes!** In just a few days of using the lysine when I returned home, the improvement was incredible! **However, have your veterinarian test for the virus first, then ASK HIS ADVICE FIRST BEFORE USING LYSINE, AND ASK HIM OR THE STAFF FOR THE RECOMMENDED DOSAGING FOR YOUR KITTEN OR CAT BEFORE ADMINISTERING IT ON YOUR OWN.**

If you do go the lysine route, most cats and kittens will start to show results in 3 or 4 days. There will be less eye and nose discharge, and the sneezing will lessen. Pate varieties of canned cat food are easiest to mix with medications.

## **EYE INFECTIONS FROM HERPES.**

FHV always shows as an eye infection in a flare-up. If your kitten has runny, goopy or pasty eyes, or they are sealed shut, clean them up with a clean washcloth in cool or room temperature water. **DO NOT USE WARM OR HOT WATER!** This can actually swell the eye, making it more uncomfortable for your kitten. Take your time to “soak” the eyelids and dissolve the crud. Dip the cloth, gently wipe, and repeat as necessary until you can gently pry the eyelids open. Usually, you will see pus pop out. Just wipe it away. You may need to do this a few times a day. You can also use a sterile saline solution. If you cannot get the eyes open, call your vet immediately.

There are a few eye ointments that are readily available for eye infections for your kitten or cat. Some without a prescription. Make sure they do **NOT contain additives like CORTISONES OR STEROID PAINKILLERS!** You can use the eye ointments 2 to 4 times a day for about 5 days, or as the label indicates from your vet.

Terramycin – Made by Pfizer, is a common eye ointment for kittens and cats that your vet might prescribe. No prescription is needed, and can be bought at certain places on the internet. It has a long shelf life and does not need to be refrigerated. Apply about 1/4 inch on your finger and kind of “roll” it into the eye. Gently close the eye and “mush” it around a little. Will need to be done a few times a day, or as prescribed by your vet, and results can be seen in about 48 hours.

Use the ointments for about 5 days or as the label or vet indicates, then stop and see what progress has been made. The eyes should be clear by this point; especially when used in conjunction with lysine. If in doubt about any product or medication, consult your vet first before use.

## **SPAY, NEUTERING AND VET COSTS**

Before visiting your vet or pet clinic, it's important to educate yourself on some key information, which you can find in this section. Many veterinarians begin their careers in shelters, rescues, or clinics, where practices can differ from those required for your kitten or cat. I've witnessed and heard instances of vets misleading clients about treatments or procedures, **such as claiming that a cat must be spayed by 6 months old to avoid cancer and death—a statement that doesn't align with reality.** It's crucial to remember that vets have substantial college loans to repay, and veterinary care is a business aimed

at making a profit. For example, **a deworming treatment with pyrantel pamoate costs around 30 cents, but a vet may charge \$30.00 for it.** It's important to question whether such treatments are necessary and whether there is evidence of worms before agreeing to them. Similarly, you might be asked to pay \$60.00 for a fecal smear or another \$60.00 for a health check or office visit during a return trip for a vaccine. In many cases, these additional charges are not essential and are primarily profit-driven, **especially today, since a lot of vets have sold out to larger corporations, and being instructed to perform all sorts of unnecessary tests for profits! Vets may claim these procedures are "standard," but you have the right to question and decline services that you have not asked for.**

When you bring your kitten in for its second or third vaccine, you can simply request the vaccine without any additional services, assuming everything is fine and no other treatments are necessary. There's no need for an exam, deworming, or fecal test unless you believe they are necessary. You should not feel obligated to pay for unnecessary items. The cost of a vaccine typically ranges from about \$7.00 to \$10.00. Spaying or neutering can be done affordably, with mobile clinics offering the service for \$70.00 and some towns even offering it for \$25.00. Some vets may suggest a blood test before the procedure, but this is not always necessary, as clinics often perform spaying and neutering without prior blood testing, and they do so frequently and safely. While some vets may insist on additional tests or procedures, such as a heart test, before spaying or neutering, it's important to remember that fees at vets are negotiable. You can discuss the procedure's details, duration, and cost with your vet, and if you're well-informed, you can negotiate the price. Spaying typically takes about 7 minutes, while neutering takes about 5 minutes. If there are specific concerns in your kitten's case, such as underlying health issues, then it may be appropriate to consider additional tests and consult with your vet about the best course of action.

If you opt for a clinic for spaying or neutering, it's important to consider the close quarters and the potential risk of exposure to other pets and the diseases they may carry. However, in a reputable clinic, every precaution is taken to ensure safety. It's advisable to check the clinic's policies regarding safety measures and sterilization procedures. Ultimately, having a good relationship with a trusted vet who is familiar with your pet's health history is invaluable. **When dealing with your vet, be clear about what you are willing to pay for and what you are not.**

**It is crucial not to spay or neuter your kitten until they are at least 10 to 12 months old. This point cannot be emphasized enough to my customers.** While many vets recommend altering kittens at 5 to 6 months, this approach is incorrect. It may be suitable for shelters, clinics, and rescues dealing with strays, feral, and outdoor cats, which is often where many vets start their careers. However, the latest research indicates that waiting longer is much better for the cat. By delaying the procedure, your cat will have the opportunity to develop better, potentially growing a bit larger, and their overall reproductive system will be more fully developed. Waiting also avoids interrupting their crucial growth period, reducing stress on their bodies. Males, in particular, benefit from a more developed urinary system, as they are more prone to stones, crystals, and blockages. Therefore, waiting allows for a better-developed and healthier cat in the long run.

When sexual organs are removed at a young age, before a kitten reaches adulthood, their hormonal development is disrupted. As they transition from kittenhood to adulthood, their bodies naturally seek these hormones for proper development, but they are no longer present. This can place additional stress on their bodies as they strive to mature into adulthood without these essential hormones.

**Statistics show that the most vulnerable time for a kitten is between 6 and 10 months of age,** so it's advisable not to add unnecessary stress during this critical period by waiting to spay or neuter. By waiting until 10 to 12 months old, your pet will have already reached about 85 to 90% of its potential growth and development, reducing the impact of the procedure on their overall development. However,

if your pet begins to exhibit behaviors such as spraying, marking territory, or going into heat multiple times, it may be appropriate to schedule the procedure. Consider this analogy: Would you remove a child's sexual organs before they reach puberty? Doing so would likely hinder their ability to fully develop physically. Therefore, it's best to wait to spay or neuter your pet.

## **VACCINES**

**While all vaccines can save lives, whether for humans or felines, they do carry risks of adverse reactions, including the risk of death. It's CRUCIAL not to over-vaccinate your pet.** Assess your environment and the risks **CAREFULLY** around your kitten to determine the necessary vaccinations. Your kitten has already received its first round of FVRCP(C), which includes the core distemper vaccine with w/wo chlamydia. Most vets recommend administering subsequent doses every 3 weeks, although intervals of 4 weeks are also acceptable. It's important not to administer rabies or any other vaccines at the same time. Ensure that the final FVRCP dose is given just after 16 weeks to ensure full effectiveness. **Rabies vaccination should be done after 4 months of age, preferably 6 months of age, and given in the hind quarter – NOT in the nape or neck region!**

Why is it necessary for the last vaccine to be administered after 16 weeks of age? Kittens receive maternal antibodies from their mother through milk during the first 48 hours after birth, before "gut closure." This transfer of antibodies protects for the first few weeks of life. However, these antibodies begin to decrease and diminish around 4.5 to 6 weeks of age and are completely gone by about 8 to 10 weeks of age. The kitten begins to develop its antibodies around 5 to 7 weeks of age, but these are not fully effective until around 16 weeks of age. During the window from 4.5 weeks to about 10 weeks, kittens are highly susceptible and vulnerable to infections as they have minimal protection. Anyone handling your kitten up to a month after their last vaccination should wash their hands first to prevent the spread of disease.

**The leukemia/AIDS vaccine carries the highest risk among feline vaccines.** More cats are likely to die from this vaccine alone than from all other vaccines combined. Therefore, it should only be considered if you believe your pet is at high risk and vaccination is absolutely necessary. It's crucial to carefully assess the risks in your environment. For instance, do you have many strays in your area? Are there children constantly going in and out, potentially leaving doors open? What are the chances of your cat escaping outdoors? Additionally, the leukemia vaccine is costly, requiring initial blood testing and an exam, followed by two or three visits to the vet for the vaccine series, with an exam fee charged each time. As a breeder, all of my cats have been tested for leukemia, with all results coming back negative, and have been vaccinated. I have taken on this risk so that you do not have to. My cattery is closed, meaning my cats do not go outside and have no contact with other animals. Furthermore, no other cats come here for breeding.

**It's important to fully understand, and be well-informed about vaccines, procedures, altering, diseases and parasites. Don't just leave it up to your vet, and take their word for granted, or assume they are doing something in the best interest of your cat! I've seen a LOT of vets make serious mistakes! Ask questions, do some research on the issue or procedure, and is it necessary, or why they are NOT doing a specific procedure, and for what reason. You should be able to freely discuss your concerns with your vet, and ask questions on everything, and he or she should have the answers. If not, then maybe you should be considering choosing another vet.**