

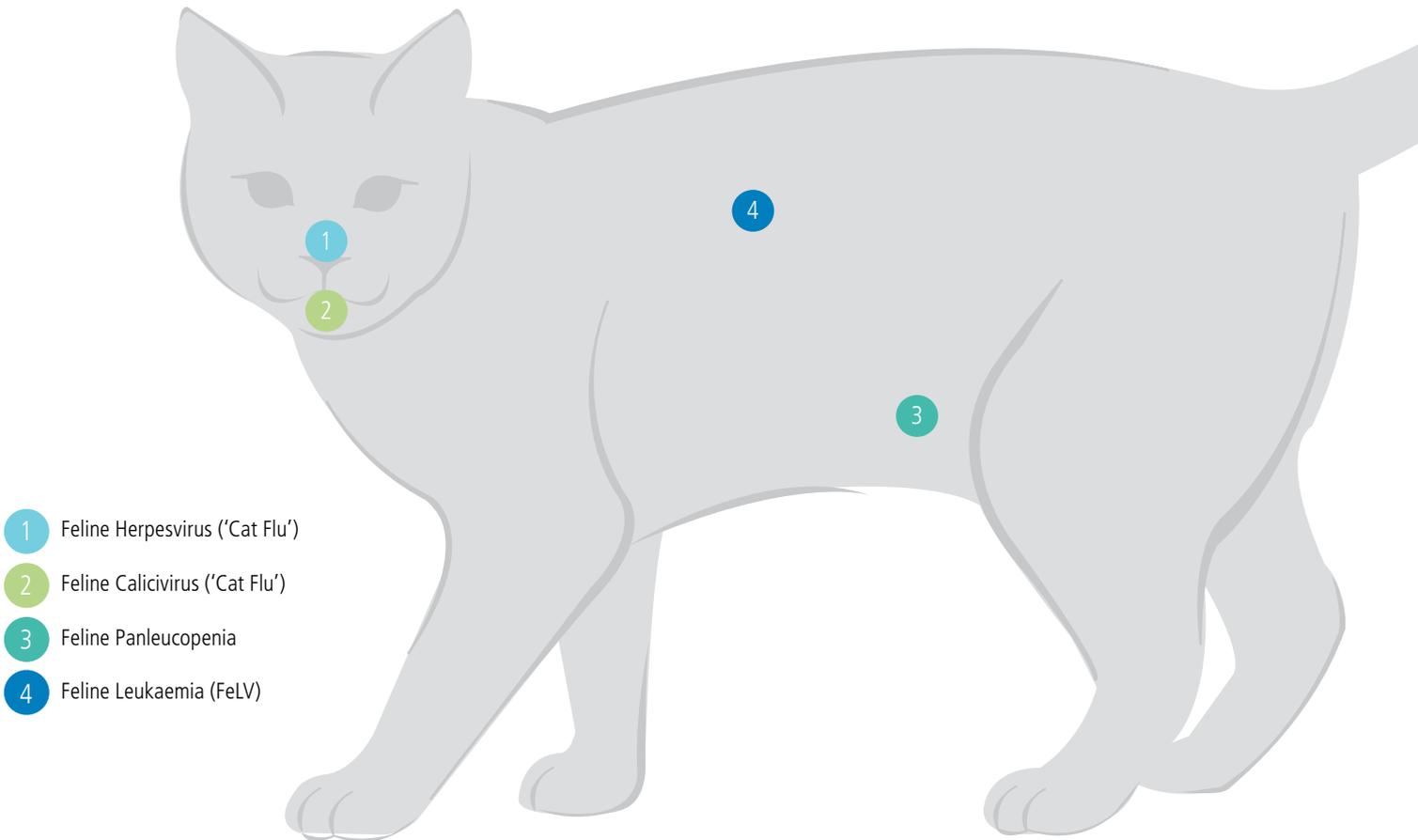
Feline diseases and vaccination

Your cat counts on you for protection

One of the very best things you can do to give your cat a long and healthy life is to ensure that he or she is vaccinated against common feline diseases. Your cat's mother gave her kitten immunity from disease for the first few weeks of existence by providing disease-fighting antibodies in her milk. After that period it's up to you – with the help and advice of your veterinarian – to provide that protection.

How do vaccines work?

Vaccines contain small quantities of modified live or killed viruses, bacteria and/or other disease-causing organisms. When administered, they stimulate your cat's immune system to produce disease-fighting cells and proteins – or antibodies – to protect against disease.



When should my cat be vaccinated?

Generally, the immunity that a kitten gains from their mother's milk begins to diminish sometime after 8-9 weeks of age. It is then time to begin the initial vaccinations, usually a course of 2 or 3 injections given 3 to 4 weeks apart. Thereafter, your cat will require repeat vaccinations for the rest of his or her life. Of course, these are only guidelines – your veterinarian will be able to determine the exact schedule that's right for your pet.

Which vaccinations should my cat receive?

Most veterinarians believe that your cat should be protected against those diseases which are most common, highly contagious and which cause serious illness. Such diseases could include Feline Panleucopenia, Feline Herpesvirus, Feline Calicivirus and Feline Leukaemia. Other vaccinations may be recommended, based on your veterinarian's evaluation of the risks posed by such factors as your cat's particular environment and lifestyle.

How effective is vaccination?

Like any drug treatment or surgical procedure, vaccinations cannot be 100% guaranteed. However, used in conjunction with proper nutrition and a clean environment, vaccination is clearly your pet's best defence against disease. Plus, when you consider what treating a serious illness can cost you and your beloved cat in terms of both money and distress, prevention through vaccination is extremely cost-effective. Vaccination effectively prevents some feline disease (e.g. feline panleucopaenia) and significantly reduces signs of illness with other diseases (e.g. 'cat flu' caused by Feline Herpesvirus and Feline Calicivirus).



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1 FELINE HERPESVIRUS ('CAT FLU')	Just as with the human common cold, the virus that causes this upper respiratory tract infection is easily transmitted from one cat to another, so vaccination is imperative if your pet will come into contact with other cats. Its symptoms may take the form of moderate fever, loss of appetite, sneezing, eye and nasal discharges and coughing. Kittens are particularly affected, but this disease can be dangerous in any unprotected cat, as effective treatment is limited. Even if a cat recovers, it can remain a carrier for life.
2 FELINE CALICIVIRUS ('CAT FLU')	This virus is another major cause of upper respiratory tract infection in cats. Widespread and highly contagious, its symptoms of fever, oral ulcers and pneumonia can range from mild to severe, depending on the strain of virus present. Once again, treatment of this disease can be difficult. Even if recovery does take place, a recovered cat can continue to infect other animals, as well as experience chronic sneezing and runny eyes. Vaccination is therefore tremendously important.
3 FELINE PANLEUCOPENIA	Sometimes known as feline infectious enteritis, this disease is caused by a virus so resistant, it can survive up to one year outside a cat's body! Therefore, as many cats will be exposed to it during their lifetime and infection rates in unprotected cats can run as high as 90% to 100%, vaccination against this potentially fatal disease is absolutely essential. Symptoms can include listlessness, diarrhoea, vomiting, severe dehydration and fever. Happily, the vaccine itself is very effective in preventing the disease; as treatment is very difficult and, even if recovery takes place, a once-infected cat can for a period of time spread the disease to other unvaccinated animals.
4 FELINE LEUKAEMIA (FeLV)	Infection with the Feline Leukaemia Virus can result in a multitude of serious health problems for your cat – everything from cancerous conditions such as lymphoma to a wide range of secondary infections caused by the destruction of the immune system. After initial exposure to the virus, a cat may show no symptoms for months, if not years, yet all the while infect others. Testing is available to determine the FeLV status of your cat. If he or she has not yet been infected but is likely to come into contact with cats that are, vaccination against this potentially fatal disease is highly recommended.

Other vaccinations

After evaluating your cat's particular situation and risk factors, your veterinarian may also recommend vaccination against other infectious diseases. These might include:

FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS (FIV) is mainly transmitted in deep bite wounds and scratches by infected cats, and can cause debilitation of the immune system leading to disease in various organs and chronic infections. A decision to vaccinate should be made after discussion with a veterinarian and consideration of the risk of the disease versus the effectiveness of the vaccine.

