



**TassieCat**

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# Keeping your cat healthy



**Vaccinating your cat** 

and information on  
feline immunodeficiency virus  
and feline leukaemia virus



# Vaccinations

**Cat owners love their cats and want them to be happy and healthy. Vaccinations are a simple and effective way to protect your cat from serious and life-threatening diseases.**

**Kittens should receive their first course of vaccination beginning at 6-8 weeks of age. However, vaccinations lose their efficiency over time and adult cats will require regular boosters for the vaccine to remain effective.**

**Keeping vaccinations up to date is an important part of routine health care and will keep your cat protected throughout its life.**

**In addition to protecting your own cat, vaccinations help to prevent the spread of disease and protect the broader cat population.**

## What are the common vaccinations for cats?

Vaccinations for cats can be divided into two groups: core vaccinations and optional vaccinations. The core vaccinations are required by all cats no matter their age, habits or the environment in which they live. Core vaccines protect against commonly occurring life-threatening diseases that have a global distribution. Optional vaccinations are required based on the likelihood of a particular cat contracting the disease. This is influenced by the lifestyle of the cat, the environment and the geographic location of where it lives.

In Australia, it is recommended that cats receive a core vaccination (F3), which protects against three common diseases: feline panleukopenia, feline calicivirus and feline herpesvirus.

Feline panleukopenia is a disease of the intestinal tract that progresses very quickly and is often fatal. Your cat may come into contact with this disease via its environment as it is caused by an extremely tough virus that can survive for months in an environment.

Feline calicivirus and feline herpesvirus are both causes of a respiratory disease in cats, also known as cat flu. Cat flu can be quite debilitating and once contracted, cats may show symptoms on and off for the rest of their lives when under stress. This core vaccination can be received as a course for kittens as well as previously unvaccinated adult cats.

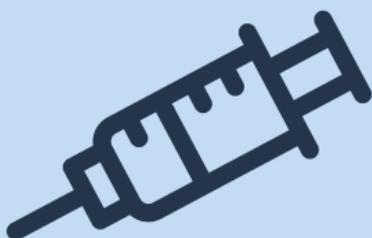
There are several optional vaccines available for cats such as vaccines against feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukaemia virus (FeLV). If there is a likelihood of your cat contracting any of these diseases, your cat may require these vaccinations to keep it safe. You should discuss your cat's circumstances with your veterinarian, and they can help you make an informed decision.

All vaccines require regular boosters to ensure continued protection. Your veterinarian can inform you how often booster shots are required.

## After-vaccination care

Following vaccination, your cat may show some sluggishness, loss of appetite or have some slight swelling or tenderness at the injection site. These symptoms generally pass within a day or two.

Access to food and water and a comfortable area to rest are usually all that is required for a quick recovery. However, if the response seems more severe, you should contact your veterinarian for advice.





# Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV)

## What is feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and how do cats get infected?

Feline immunodeficiency virus is a relatively common disease in outdoor cats in Australia. It is a virus that attacks the immune system, leaving the cat vulnerable to secondary infections and disease. Once a cat is infected, the disease can progress to feline acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, otherwise known as feline AIDS. Although FIV can have serious consequences, infected cats can live long and healthy lives when they are provided with suitable care and regular health checks.

FIV is mainly spread through deep bite wounds that occur during aggressive cat fights and territorial disputes. A less common transmission pathway is from an infected mother cat to her kittens, either during birth or via the ingestion of infected milk. The disease cannot be transmitted through the sharing of food bowls, litter trays or toys.

**{ Note: FIV is a cat-specific disease and cannot be transmitted to humans or other animals.**

## Prevention of FIV infection

- ▶ Keep your cat safe and happy indoors or provide it with an outdoor cat enclosure to prevent it from fighting with other cats.
- ▶ Test any new cats you want to bring into the household for FIV. FIV infected cats can still come into the household, but the introduction will have to happen slowly and under constant supervision to avoid fights.
- ▶ Consider vaccinating your cat. FIV is transmitted by cat fights and is primarily a concern for outdoor cats. Please talk to your veterinarian to discuss whether vaccination is an option for your cat.

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## Symptoms and treatment for FIV

The initial symptoms of the infection are relatively mild and consist of swollen lymph nodes, fever, diarrhoea, poor appetite and lethargy. These symptoms often go unnoticed and in most circumstances the cat will recover and will not show any further symptoms for many years. However, as FIV slowly weakens the immune system, an infected cat will start to succumb to other diseases. Common signs include weight loss, inflammation of the eyes and mouth, skin infections and chronic illnesses. If your cat shows any of these symptoms, please take them to your veterinarian for a health check. A simple blood test can be used to diagnose the disease.

Unfortunately, there is no specific antiviral treatment for FIV infection. Therefore, current treatment focuses mainly on easing the symptoms of secondary diseases.

## Caring for an FIV infected cat

An FIV infected cat can live a long and healthy life with appropriate care and regular health checks. Due to their compromised immune system, a key component of care for an FIV infected cat is the prevention of any secondary diseases. This can be achieved by:

- ▶ monitoring the health and behaviour of your cat. Even small changes in a cat's behaviour, for example sluggishness or loss of appetite, can indicate an illness;
- ▶ organising a twice-yearly health check at the veterinarian;
- ▶ maintaining routine preventative healthcare such as regular parasite treatments and keeping vaccinations up to date;
- ▶ keeping your cat indoors where it is safer from disease and accidents; and
- ▶ providing a balanced diet and avoiding raw meat and eggs. Avoiding these products will reduce the risk of exposure to parasites and bacteria that might cause disease.

Additionally, all FIV infected cats should be desexed to prevent the spread of the disease to another generation of kittens.

# Feline leukaemia virus (FeLV)

## What is feline leukaemia virus (FeLV) and how is it spread?

Feline leukaemia virus is not as common as FIV and fewer cats will require a vaccination. Feline leukaemia is a viral infection that weakens the immune system and eventually produces a fatal illness in infected cats. The virus is found in saliva, urine, milk and other secretions and is most commonly spread through grooming, shared food and water bowls, from mothers to their kittens and through bite wounds in cat fights. Close contact between cats is needed to spread the virus, because it cannot survive in the environment very long. Kittens are most vulnerable to infections of FeLV as the resistance to the virus increases with age. However, adults are still at risk, especially if they are in prolonged contact or receive a bite from an infected cat.

Exposure to the feline leukaemia virus doesn't necessarily mean the cat will become sick; about 70% of adult cats that encounter the virus are able to resist infection or eliminate the virus on their own.

**{ Note: FeLV is a cat-specific disease and cannot be transmitted to humans or other animals.**

## Prevention of FeLV infection

- ▶ Keep your cat safe and happy indoors or provide it with an outdoor cat enclosure to reduce contact with unknown cats.
- ▶ Test any new cats you want to bring into the household for FeLV. Feline leukaemia is a potentially fatal disease, and because it is spread through close contact, it is unwise to introduce an FeLV infected cat to a household with a healthy cat, especially if you own a young cat.
- ▶ Consider vaccinating your cat. Whether a cat requires a vaccination for FeLV depends on its circumstances. Feline leukaemia virus is primarily a concern for group-housed and outdoor cats. Solitary indoor cats have a very low risk of contracting the disease. Please discuss with your veterinarian whether vaccinating against FeLV is appropriate for your cat.

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