

## **Cats Can Get The Flu Too!**

### **What is cat flu?**

Cat flu is the common term used to describe upper respiratory tract disease in cats with symptoms including sneezing, discharge from the nose and eyes, fever and loss of appetite. Depending on the type of flu, mouth ulcers and eye ulcers may also be seen. Similar to human flu, the severity of symptoms seen will vary between different cats depending on the cat's immunity. Some cats may show no signs when first infected but then start to shed the virus and show clinical signs during times of stress (e.g. pregnancy, change in living environments, concurrent disease or poor nutrition). Once infected, the viruses remain with the cat for life. Cats may show no clinical signs but still shed the virus.

### **What causes cat flu?**

Cat flu can be caused by several pathogens (organisms that cause diseases). Feline herpes virus (FHV) and feline calicivirus (FCV) are the most common causes accounting for about 80% of cat flu cases, with occasional cases caused by a bacteria called Chlamydia.

The viruses are found in the eyes, noses and mouths of infected cats. Close contact with infected cats is not necessary to spread the disease as the viruses can travel up to 1.3m after a sneeze. Cat flu can also be transmitted by indirect contact via people's hands or clothes, contaminated food bowls, cages and bedding etc.

Cats of all ages can be infected with cat flu but kittens are the most susceptible. Immunosuppressed or non-vaccinated cats are also very susceptible. Close housing, such as in catteries and shelters, will greatly increase the chance of your cat getting infected.

### **How is cat flu prevented?**

Avoiding exposure to cat flu is very difficult as many cats are likely to be infected without any obvious outward signs. So prevention (by vaccination) rather than avoidance is the best approach.

Vaccinating your cat with the standard F3 vaccination will protect it against FHV & FCV. Kittens need to receive a series of three vaccinations (at 8, 12 and 16 weeks of age) to make sure their immunity reaches the right levels, then an annual booster is required. Unfortunately vaccination will not always prevent infection but it will lessen the severity of the disease.

### **How is cat flu treated?**

Once infected with cat flu, cats become carriers for life – there is no cure. Treatment is aimed at relieving the symptoms with supportive care until the cat recovers on its own. This includes keeping the nose clear of discharge as a “blocked-up” cat will often lose its appetite. It is important to encourage your cat to eat & drink so provide warmed, palatable foods and lots of TLC. A steam bath may also help – take the cat into the bathroom while you have a nice hot shower!

If your cat refuses to eat or drink completely then please seek veterinary advice immediately. Force feeding may be necessary and intravenous fluids may also be required to treat dehydration. Although most cats recover from cat flu, it may take several weeks for the signs to abate (particularly with

herpesvirus infections). Antibiotics may be prescribed (even if the cause is viral) to protect against secondary bacterial infections which can make the disease more severe.

**Can I catch colds & flu from my cat?**

No, it is not possible to catch a cold or flu from your cat, nor can your cat catch a cold or flu from you. But your cat can catch flu from other cats.

If you are concerned that your cat may have cat flu or been exposed to cat flu, or if you have any questions about vaccination, please give us a call.