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is still possible for a vaccinated cat to contract “cat flu”, but the infection is not likely to become severe.

There are a variety of vaccines available.

Neither virus is very hardy, FHV-1 will survive in the environment for a maximum of 48 hours. FCV may survive for 7-10 days.

In multi-cat households or catteries, vaccination alone may not be sufficient to control the disease. In these cases, quarantine is also required. Disinfection is of limited value as the viruses are spread mainly via aerosol. A large problem faced when introducing new cats to a household is that some cats are “carriers”. These cats are infected with virus but don’t have clinical signs. They are infectious to other cats only when shedding virus-this can be an intermittent or continual process. 50-80% of cats infected with “cat flu” will become carriers.

Even if your cat contracts cat flu, yearly vaccinations should be maintained as immunity to infection is transient and needs to be boosted.

## Vaccinations

- We recommend that all kittens be vaccinated at 6-8 weeks of age, then boosted at 12-14 weeks and 16-18 weeks.
- Vaccinations are thereafter yearly and should be maintained.
- Current vaccinations are essential for any cat that is going to go to a boarding cattery.
- Vaccines that are routinely given are for Feline Enteritis and Feline Herpes virus Type 1 and Feline Calicivirus.

*Additional vaccines are available to protect against Feline Chlamydia and Feline Leukaemia virus.*

### Client information series

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# Cat Flu

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## *Client information series*

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# Upper Respiratory Infection

“**Cat Flu**” is a common disease in cats of all ages, but is especially severe in young kittens and purebred cats. A number of infectious agents have been found to cause ‘cat flu’ but most infections are caused by one of two viruses, herpes virus type I (FHV-I) and feline calicivirus (FCV)

## **Clinical Signs**

Signs of “cat flu” are similar to those of cold and flu in people. FHV-I tends to cause more severe symptoms, with conjunctivitis and nasal infection. This causes a clear nasal and eye discharge which becomes thickened and purulent as secondary bacterial infec-

tions become involved. Cats tend to be dull and depressed with elevated temperatures, reluctance to eat and sneezing. Coughing can be a feature and may progress to pneumonia. Without treatment the signs tend to resolve in 2-3 weeks. Some cats are left with chronic nasal discharge. Treatment can significantly aid recovery.

FCV tends to cause less serious disease, but clinical signs are dependent on the strain of the virus involved. Mouth ulceration can be a prominent feature causing severe lack of appetite and drooling. Some strains of FCV may cause a lameness and fever syndrome in kittens, and chronic gingivitis and throat inflammation is also believed to be caused by FCV.

## **Diagnosis**

Diagnosis is based on clinical signs and history. Specific identification of the virus may be done by swabbing the throat of the cat and then culture and identification by a laboratory. This is not a readily available service.

## **Treatment**

Specific anti-viral agents have not been available until recently. A new drug recently released is said to enhance the immune response of the cat and so eliminate the virus faster.

Most treatment is aimed at suppressing secondary bacterial infections and stimulating eating and drinking. Dehydration in particular can cause increased illness.

Multivitamins and drugs that break up secretions help with the recovery and comfort of the patient.

Good nursing care is essential for rapid recovery from “cat flu” Severely ill cats may require hospitalization for intensive treatment and intravenous fluids.

## **Prevention**

The main method of preventing “cat flu’ is vaccination. As with human flu vaccinations, not all strains of the viruses which may cause “cat flu’ are covered. It