

Cat flu

Overview

- Cat flu is an illness that causes similar symptoms to human flu (a high temperature, sneezing, weepy eyes and a snotty nose).
- Unfortunately, once a cat has caught cat flu it's possible for them to become a lifetime carrier and suffer symptoms throughout life.
- Fortunately, we can protect our cats from flu by vaccinating them.
- There is no specific cure, but treatment can help reduce symptoms, speed up recovery, and limit future flare-ups.
- Kittens are usually more severely affected than adults because they find it harder to fight infections.
- Contact your vet if you notice the symptoms of cat flu.

[Vaccinating your cat during the pandemic](#)

General information

Cat flu is an illness that causes similar symptoms to human colds/flu (a high temperature, sneezing, weepy eyes and a snotty nose).



This cat has flu – note his weepy eyes and snotty nose.

It's extremely contagious and spreads in saliva, snot, sneezes and on items such as food bowls and bedding. Cat flu can be serious, especially in kittens; some recover, but others become carriers and continue to have symptoms throughout their life.



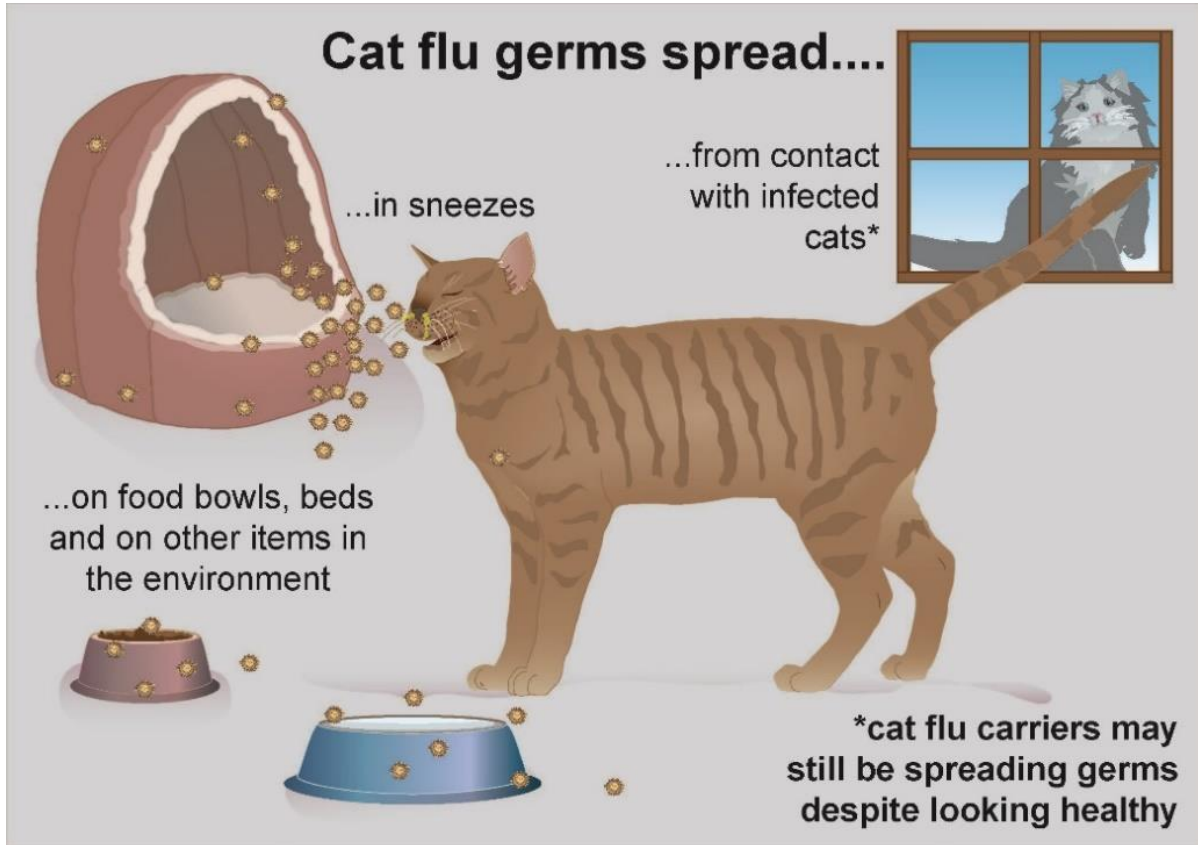
A kitten with cat flu

Vaccination

Fortunately, we can [vaccinate](#) against cat flu. Have your cat vaccinated as soon they are old enough (8-9 weeks) and continue regular vaccines throughout their lives. Don't let them outside until they have been fully vaccinated.

Spread

Cat flu germs spreads in saliva, snot, sneezes and on surfaces such as food bowls and bedding (see image below). Cats that have recovered from cat flu often continue spreading germs for a few weeks after they appear better. Some cats never fully get rid of cat flu and continue to shed germs throughout their life.



Symptoms

Symptoms of cat flu include:

- [Sneezing](#)
- [Weepy eyes](#)
- A snotty nose
- [Painful eyes](#) (flu can cause eye ulcers)
- [Lethargy \(low energy\)](#)
- [Reduced appetite](#)
- Mouth ulcers
- [Fever \(high temperature\)](#)
- Sore throat (you might see swallowing or gagging)
- Coughing

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet for an appointment if you notice symptoms of flu. It's important to have kittens seen quickly because they can rapidly deteriorate.

IMPORTANT: When you arrive for your appointment, wait outside to prevent spreading flu to other cats in the waiting room.

Treatment

There is no cure for cat flu but there are many things that can be done to reduce symptoms and speed up recovery, including:

- **Anti-inflammatories** - to reduce inflammation and bring down a high temperature.
- **Mucolytics** - help break down mucus in your cat's nose and airways to help them breathe more easily. This also helps them to smell their food which is important to keep them eating.
- **Eye drops** - lubricating eye drops (similar to artificial tears) can be used to sooth sore eyes while they heal. Antibiotic eye drops will be given if your vet suspects an eye infection. **IMPORTANT:** Antibiotic eye drops will only be given if necessary, and won't help if your cat's symptoms are caused by a virus. If your cat is given eye drops, follow the instructions and complete the course (even if they look better before the course has finished).

Video: how to give eye drops to your cat

- **Antibiotics** - antibiotics don't kill viruses, so they will only be given if your vet thinks your cat has a bacterial infection. If your cat is prescribed antibiotics, make sure you finish the whole course, even if they seem better before it's finished.
- **Antivirals** - can help speed up recovery from cat flu. Antivirals need to be used for three to four weeks, aren't always effective, and can be very

expensive compared to other treatments. Speak to your vet for more information.

- **Hospitalisation** - if your cat has severe symptoms, becomes seriously unwell, or stops eating and drinking, they are likely to need intensive treatment in your veterinary hospital.

Prevention

[Vaccination, vaccination, vaccination](#) - we can vaccinate kittens against flu from 8-9 weeks old. To stay protected your cat will need regular booster vaccinations throughout their life. Even if your cat has had flu in the past, vaccination can help reduce symptoms in the future.

Home care for cat flu

Once your cat has been treated by your vet there are some things you can do at home to help them recover:

- **Wipe their eyes and nose** - to help your cat feel better, smell their food and breathe more easily, use a cotton wool pad soaked in warm water to wipe any discharge from their eyes and nose.
- **Reduce stress** - keep your cat's life as stress-free as possible because stress can make illness worse.
- **Help them eat** - if your cat isn't eating, add a small amount of warm, smelly food to their meals (e.g. sardines, anchovies or tuna). If this doesn't work try warming it slightly, make sure it's not too hot and mix it well.
- **Help them breathe.** Help your cat break down some of the thick mucus in their airways (and breathe more easily) by sitting with them in a steamy room (i.e. the bathroom while you are having a shower or a bath). Don't ever force your cat into a steamy room and take them out if they seem stressed at any point.

Recovery and outlook

With treatment, symptoms of flu often get better within one to two weeks.

Unfortunately once a cat has caught cat flu, it's possible they will become a

'carrier' and suffer from 'flare-ups' throughout their life. Some, less fortunate cat flu carriers have symptoms all the time (perhaps a runny nose, loud breathing, sneezing or weepy eyes), and need to be on constant medication. Cat flu carriers are most at risk of symptoms when they are stressed or poorly.

FAQ's

Can I catch cat flu? No, cat flu only affects cats, humans and other animals aren't affected by it.

How long does cat flu last in the environment? Cat flu viruses can survive outside a cat's body for up to a month.

My cat has already had the flu, will vaccination help? Yes, even if your cat has already had flu, [vaccination](#) can reduce symptoms in the future.

Cat flu in kittens

Cat flu often affects kittens more severely than adult cats because it's harder for them to fight infections. [Read more about cat flu in kittens.](#)

Published: June 2020