

## Cat flu in kittens

### Overview

**Cat flu can make a kitten very poorly and even cause death. Speak to your vet about getting your kitten vaccinated against cat flu.**

Cat flu often affects kittens more severely than adult cats because they find it trickier to fight infections.

Unfortunately once your kitten has caught cat flu, it's possible they will become a carrier for life and suffer with 'flare-ups' from time to time.

Like human flu, there is no specific cure for cat flu but treatment can help to make a kitten feel better, speed up their recovery and limit future flare-ups.

Contact your vet straight away if you notice any signs of cat flu in your kitten.



*Severe cat flu symptoms in a kitten*

## Vaccination

**Vaccinate your kitten to protect them against cat flu.**

Have your kitten vaccinated as soon they are old enough and continue regular vaccines throughout their lives. Even if your kitten has already had flu, vaccination can reduce symptoms in the future.

Don't let your kitten out of your house until they have been fully vaccinated.

## Symptoms

The symptoms of cat flu are often very severe in kittens.

- Sneezing
- Weepy, sore eyes
- Closing eyes (cat flu can cause eye ulcers)
- Sore throat (swallowing or gagging)
- Runny nose or snuffling
- Fever (high temperature)
- Ulcers in the mouth
- Coughing
- Lethargy
- Not eating or eating less than usual

Kittens with cat flu may also develop more severe symptoms:

- Pneumonia (lung infections)
- Eye ulcers so severe that sometimes the eye has to be removed
- Breathing problems which can be long term if there is damage to the throat, nose or lungs
- Limping due to pain and swelling in all of their joints.

## When to contact your vet

It is very important to contact your vet straight away if your kitten is showing any of symptoms of cat flu.

You know your kitten best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to book an appointment with your vet.

### **IMPORTANT**

**If you think your kitten may have cat flu, inform the vets when you phone for an appointment. It's likely they'll ask you to wait in the car with them to help prevent the spread of cat flu to other cats and kittens in the waiting room.**

## Causes

Most cases of cat flu are caused by the nasty bugs listed below:

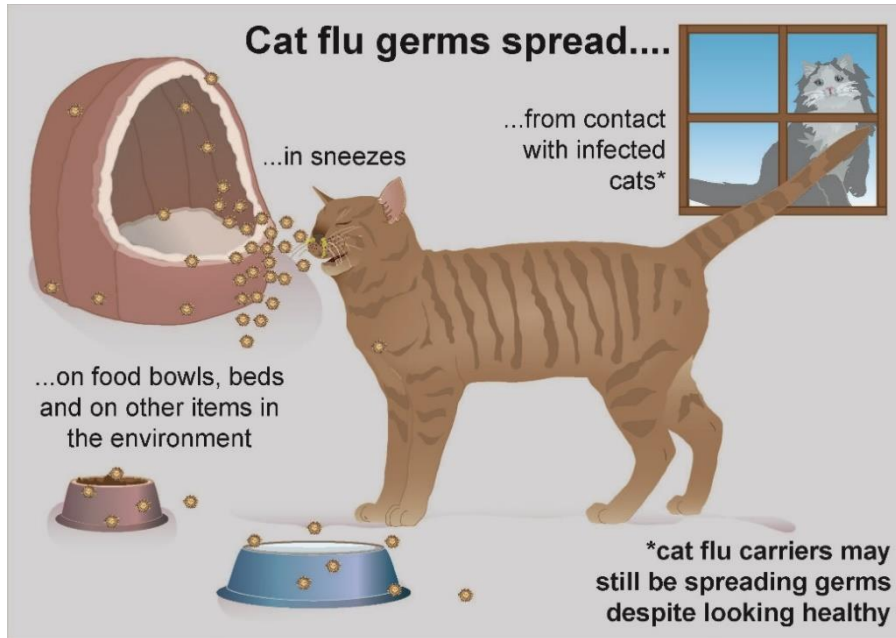
1. Herpes virus
2. Calici virus
3. Chlamydophila bacteria

A kitten only needs to catch one of these bugs to develop cat flu, but they will often catch more than one.

Cat flu is extremely contagious and kittens most commonly catch it from their mother. Cat flu germs spread in saliva, snot, sneezes and on items such as food bowls and bedding.

## Can kittens catch flu from humans?

No, cats can't catch human flu and humans can't catch cat flu. Dogs can't catch cat flu either!



## Treatment

There is no cure for cat flu but there are lots of things that can be done to speed up recovery. Your vet might offer you the following treatment:

### Anti-inflammatory pain relief

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) drugs can be used to bring down a fever and settle pain and swelling.

### Antibiotics

Antibiotics fight infections caused by bacteria. Antibiotics are often given to kittens with cat flu to prevent more serious disease. Severe bacterial infections can take hold if your kitten is weak from fighting cat flu. If your kitten is prescribed antibiotics, always finish the course, even if they seem better.

### **Mucolytics**

Mucolytics help break down the mucus in your cat's nose and airways. This helps them breathe more easily and smell their food, which is important to keep them eating.

### **Eye drops**

Lubricating eye drops (similar to false tears) may be used to keep the eyes moist while they heal.

Antibiotic eye drops fight bacterial infections. They will often be given to kittens with cat flu to prevent ulcers in the eye. Your vet won't always dispense antibiotic eye drops for cat flu because bacteria aren't always involved. If your kitten is given eye drops it's very important to follow the instructions and complete the course to ensure the infection doesn't come back.

### **Antiviral medication**

Antiviral medication can be used to help the body fight viruses by speeding up recovery. This does not work for every kitten. It has to be given for 3-4 weeks and can be costly compared to other treatments.

## **Outlook**

Some kittens will fully recover from cat flu and never have a problem again.

Unfortunately, some kittens don't manage to fully get rid of the virus and become 'carriers'. This means they have the virus for their whole life. Some cat flu carriers have flare-ups from time to time, often brought on during times of stress or when their body is fighting another illness.

Other cat flu carriers show symptoms all the time (perhaps a runny nose, loud breathing, sneezing or weepy eyes). These cats may need to be on constant medication to control their symptoms. Vaccinate your kitten to prevent cat flu.

## Home care

Kittens with suspected cat flu need be seen by a vet, they can go downhill very quickly without treatment. Once they have seen the vet, there are also things you can do at home to help them feel better and recover as quickly as possible.

### **Wipe weepy eyes and snotty noses**

Use a cotton wool pad soaked in warm water to wipe away any muck from your cat's eyes and nose. This will help them feel better, breathe more easily and smell their food (which keeps their appetite going).

### **Reduce stress**

Keep your kitten's life as stress-free as possible. Stress lowers their natural defences against disease and increases the chance of a flu flare-up lasting longer.

### **Warm and strong smelling food**

Tempt your cat to eat by adding a small amount of strong smelling food (e.g. sardines, anchovies or tuna) to their normal meals. Warm food also smells stronger. Mix warmed food thoroughly and make sure it's not too hot.

### **Help them decongest**

Steamy rooms (i.e. the bathroom while you are having a shower or a bath) can help break down some of the thick mucus in your cat's airways. This helps them breathe more easily. Don't ever force your cat into a steamy room and remove them if they seem stressed at any point. Stress can make illness much worse.

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