

Cat flu

Overview

Cat flu causes sneezing, weepy eyes, a runny nose, and can make your cat feel very unwell.

Cat flu is highly contagious; it spreads in discharge, sneezes and on items touched by infected cats. Vaccination is the only way to protect your cat against cat flu.

If your cat has caught cat flu it's possible they will become a carrier for life. Cat flu carriers are likely to suffer with 'flare-ups' from time to time and can spread germs even when they have no symptoms.

There is no specific cure for cat flu. Treatment given by vets is to help your cat feel better, speed up recovery and limit future flare-ups.

Contact your vet if you notice any signs of cat flu. Protect your cat with regular vaccinations.



Cat with cat flu – note the weepy eyes and a snotty nose.

Vaccination

Regularly vaccinate your cat to protect them from cat flu. Even if your cat has had cat flu in the past, vaccination can reduce symptoms in the future.



Protect your cat with regular vaccinations.

Symptoms

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

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet if your cat is showing the symptoms of cat flu. You know your cat best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to contact your vet.

IMPORTANT

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

Causes

The three germs below cause most cases of cat flu:

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

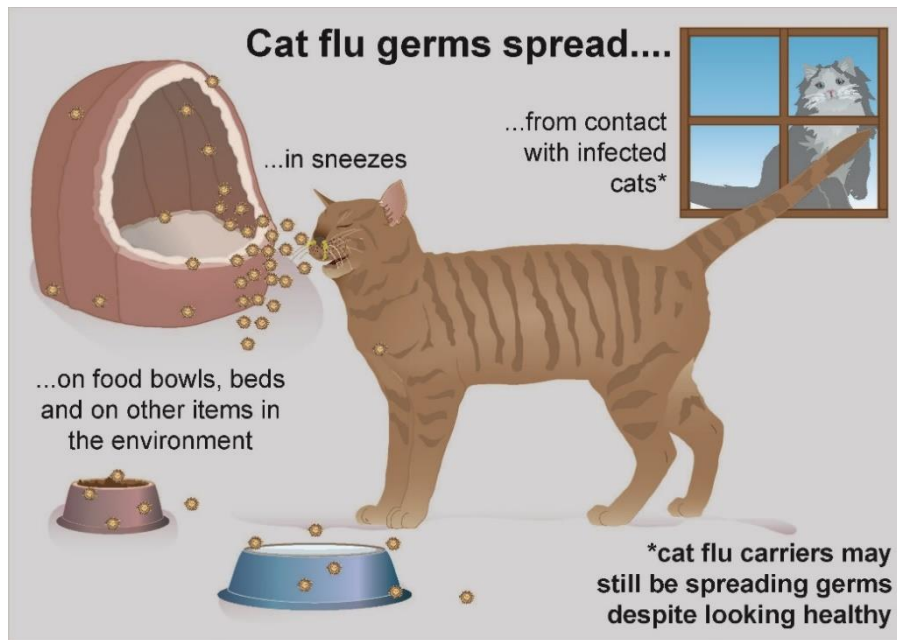
A cat only needs to catch one of these germs to develop cat flu, but they often catch more than one.

Cat flu germs spreads via:

- Saliva (dribble)
- Snot
- Sneezes
- Items such as food bowls, water bowls or bedding

Infected cats can spread germs for several weeks after they appear better in themselves and cat flu carriers spread intermittently, for life. Your cat is at high risk of catching cat flu unless they are regularly vaccinated.

Healthy cats should always be kept away from cats with cat flu even if they've been vaccinated – no vaccine provides 100% protection.



Can cats catch human flu?

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

Cat flu in kittens

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

Check out our information on cat flu in kittens (www.pdsa.org.uk/catfluinkittens).

Treatment

There is no cure for cat flu but there are lots of things that can be done to speed up recovery and make your cat feel better.

Your vet might provide the following treatments:

Anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

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. Your vet may not always prescribe antibiotics for cat flu because many cases are caused by viruses, so antibiotics won't help. If your cat is given antibiotics, always finish the course, even if they seem better.

Mucolytics

Mucolytics are a type of medication that 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. Your vet won't always dispense antibiotic eye drops for cat flu because bacteria aren't always involved. If your cat 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 cat flu. Antiviral medication sometimes speeds up recovery but not always. It has to be given for 3-4 weeks and can be costly compared to other treatments.

Outlook

Most fit and healthy cats recover from cat flu in one to three weeks.

Unfortunately, some cats don't manage fully to clear the virus from their body and become 'carriers'. This means they have the virus for their whole lives. 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, sneezing or weepy eyes). These cats may need to be on constant medication to control the symptoms.

Have your cat vaccinated by your vet to prevent them getting cat flu.

Home care for cat flu

Cats with cat flu should always be seen by a vet. Once they've been seen, there is some action you can take 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 up).

Reduce stress

Keep your cat's life as stress-free as possible. Stress lowers their natural defences against disease and increases the chance of a 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

meal. 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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