

## Are Booster Vaccines Necessary for Cats?

Primary vaccination is essential in order to prevent the return of the once common deadly infectious diseases in kittens and cats. Recent research indicates that not all vaccines require yearly boosters. However, there is no evidence that annual booster vaccination is anything but beneficial to the majority of cats. Published research has shown conclusively that abstaining from some boosters can put your cat at risk.

**"Just because your cat has a high serum antibody, these antibodies may not ensure adequate disease protection if your cat is exposed to a virulent strain of disease."**

To establish whether boosters are necessary for your cat, blood tests to measure the amount of **antibodies** (antibody titers) are sometimes recommended. Unfortunately, these tests are often more expensive than revaccination and may be stressful to your cat. In addition, just because your cat has a high serum antibody, it does not mean that these antibodies will ensure adequate disease protection if your cat is exposed to a virulent strain of disease.

Government regulatory bodies have strict guidelines for vaccines, and manufacturers must prove that a vaccine is safe and effective before it can be used in your cat. Through vigilance and high standards, the veterinary vaccines used today are the safest and most protective ever.

### **I would prefer my cat to have boosters only when necessary. Is this okay?**

It is possible, but in order to determine when boosters might be necessary for an individual cat, it is necessary to test the cat's blood to determine the antibody titers, or actual level of immunity against each specific disease. If a specific antibody titer is found to be low, your cat will require a booster vaccine. Currently, few monovalent vaccines, or vaccines that protect only against one disease, are available; when they are available they are likely to cost as much, if not more, than a multivalent vaccine that protects against multiple diseases.

From your cat's point of view, it is preferable to receive one injection against the common diseases rather than a series of single disease vaccinations.

In the past, veterinarians recommended booster vaccinations for cats on a yearly basis. However, as research into vaccines progresses, recommendations for booster frequency continue to evolve. The appropriate interval for boosters will vary with individual circumstances and vaccine type. Recent studies have demonstrated that some viral vaccines may convey at least three years of immunity. This is not the case with bacterial vaccines, which usually still require annual boosters.



## "Most adult cats should be revaccinated every one to three years based on lifestyle risk assessment."

Most adult cats that received the full booster series of vaccines as kittens should be revaccinated every one to three years based on a lifestyle risk assessment. Currently the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) vaccination guidelines recommend that low-risk adult cats that received the full booster series of vaccines as kittens can be vaccinated every three years for the **core vaccines** (feline viral rhinotracheitis, feline calicivirus, feline panleukopenia, and rabies), and then as determined by your veterinarian for any **non-core vaccines** such as feline infectious peritonitis (FIP), *Chlamydia*, or *Bordetella*. Some members of the AAFP consider feline leukemia virus (FeLV) to be a core vaccine while other experts classify it as a non-core vaccine. Most agree that FeLV vaccination is a core vaccine for kittens.

A cat that is totally indoors and lives in an apartment building would be a reasonable candidate for less frequent vaccination, while a cat that goes outdoors or is in frequent contact with other cats would be considered to be at high-risk and should be vaccinated more frequently.

Some vaccine manufacturers have developed approved three-year vaccines for many of the core antigens; these vaccines are not available in all countries. It is important to note that administering a vaccine that is labeled for annual administration at a different interval, such as every three years, is an **off-label** use and may violate government regulations. Before adjusting your cat's vaccination booster schedule, it is important to thoroughly discuss your cat's lifestyle with your veterinarian and determine the vaccines are appropriate for your cat and how often they should be given.

## "Ultimately, how frequently your cat should be vaccinated is determined by your cat's lifestyle and relative risk."

Ultimately, how frequently your cat should be vaccinated is determined by your cat's lifestyle and relative risk. Ask your veterinarian about the type and schedule of vaccines that is appropriate for your cat.

## Are there any other advantages of annual vaccination?

Not all vaccines provide protection for a year. In particular, vaccines that protect against non-viral diseases such as *Chlamydia* and *Bordetella* provide immunity for less than a year. Some experts also recommend annual revaccination with feline leukemia vaccine if your cat is exposed to other cats on a regular basis. You and your veterinarian should decide which vaccinations your cat receives annually based on your cat's lifestyle, age, and health status.

Prior to vaccine administration, your veterinarian will perform a health or wellness examination. You will be asked specific questions about your cat's health status, and the veterinarian will check your cat's head, neck, chest and abdomen, muscles, skin, joints, and lymph nodes. Annual vaccines mean annual examination by a veterinarian; veterinarians frequently detect infections of the teeth or ears, and **sub-clinical diseases** (diseases that are not presenting definite or observable symptoms) such as underlying heart conditions, metabolic problems or organ dysfunction during these visits. Early diagnosis allows more effective and successful treatment and may improve the quality of your cat's life.

## If we decide to use a less frequent vaccination schedule, how often should my cat get a health or wellness examination?

Cats age at a more rapid rate than humans do. Therefore, it is important to ensure that they receive a complete physical examination on at least an annual basis. As they approach their senior years, they should receive a complete physical examination more frequently, such as twice a year. In general, a cat that is more than 10 years old is considered to be a middle-aged to senior cat.

**"Regardless of the vaccine schedule that is most appropriate for your cat, he or she should be seen by your veterinarian for a wellness examination on at least an annual basis."**

Regardless of the vaccine schedule that is most appropriate for your cat, to ensure your cat receives the highest standard of care and protection, he or she should be seen by your veterinarian for a wellness examination on at least an annual basis.

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