



# Kitten Wellness Issues

***Core vaccinations are the annual booster and Rabies.***

***A Feline Leukemia vaccine may be recommended based on your kitten's life style.***

***All kittens are born with intestinal parasites and should be dewormed.***

## Vaccinations

The core vaccinations recommended for every kitten includes Rabies and the annual booster. The annual booster vaccinates against 4 common infectious agents: Feline Distemper (or Panleukopenia) virus, Calicivirus, Feline Rhinotracheitis (or Herpes) virus, and Chlamydia bacterium. Multiple vaccinations are required to build up immunity in kittens. As adults, they only need to receive the annual booster yearly, and the Rabies is only once every 3 years as long as the vaccination is given on or before the due date. Iowa law states the Rabies will automatically be considered valid for 1 year if given after the due date.

The other vaccination that is commonly recommended is for Feline Leukemia Virus. The Feline Leukemia vaccination requires multiple vaccinations in kittens but is only given every 2 years once immunity has been established. Feline Leukemia virus is most commonly spread through bite wounds but can be spread through contact or via the mother. The vaccination is recommended for all kittens, due to their extremely susceptible nature, and any cat who goes outdoors.

Common side effects seen with vaccinations include lethargy, soreness at the site of the injection, and decreased appetite. Occasionally vomiting and diarrhea can also be seen. These signs generally resolve within 24-48 hours after the vaccine has been given. You should call your veterinarian immediately if you note any facial swelling, difficulty breathing or hives in your cat.

## Parasites

Nearly all kittens are born with intestinal parasites. Kittens should be dewormed multiple times up until 4 months of age. Intestinal parasite eggs are shed in the feces and can make the kitten's litter box a source of reinfection. Frequent deworming helps to prevent reinfection. Strongid is a dewormer that is effective against the common kitten parasites, roundworms and hookworms. Kittens are commonly exposed to and more susceptible to other parasites as well. Microscopic evaluation of a fecal sample is recommended to identify any parasites that may require additional treatment. Since cats walk through their litter box and then groom themselves, they are prone to reinfesting themselves. Yearly deworming is recommended for cats to control reinfestation.

All kittens should be protected against fleas and possibly Heartworms. Heartworms are a parasite of the heart that is spread by mosquitoes. Cats are more resistant to heartworm but respond more severely to an infestation than dogs. Fleas are generally spread through contact and infest the kitten's skin. Fleas tend to prefer infesting cats over dogs so any cat who goes outdoors should be protected. If you cat goes outdoors, it is only a matter of time before they become infested with fleas. Tick infestations are less common in cats, but some cats tend to be prone to acquiring ticks. These cats should also be on a regular tick preventative. There are multiple forms of protection, and your veterinarian can recommend the appropriate preventative for your pet.

## Feline Leukemia Virus and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus Testing

Feline Leukemia Virus and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus are both similar to the AIDS virus in humans. Feline Leukemia Virus suppresses the immune system making cats more susceptible to other disease and causes a reduction in the oxygen carrying red blood cells. The

**Feline Leukemia and Immunodeficiency Viruses are common, potentially life threatening viruses that can be tested for.**

**Higher quality foods can promote a healthier kitten and help prevent some medical issues.**

virus also affects nearly every organ system in the cat's body. It commonly causes death in an infected kitten before they reach 2 years of age. Some cats can fight the virus off or will become infected for the rest of their life. Feline Immunodeficiency Virus is similar to Feline Leukemia Virus but generally has less severe symptoms. Many cats show no symptoms for years. Infected cats are more prone to infection and tend to live shorter lives than the average cat. Both viruses are spread mainly through bite wounds but can be transmitted through contact and via the mother.

Feline Leukemia and Immunodeficiency Viruses are both evaluated for in the same test. The test requires 3 drops of blood and approximately 10 minutes to get results. Testing is recommended for any new cat, especially if they came from an outdoor environment. We strongly recommend testing any new cat if you have other cats at home. Your kitten's viral status should be known **BEFORE** your other cats can be potentially exposed as well. Many people prefer to know if their kitten has either potentially fatal virus before they spend money on spaying/neutering their kitten. If your kitten tests positive for either virus, your veterinarian can make further recommendations for you and your kitten.

## Nutrition

Providing your kitten with a high quality food is especially important for healthy growth and development. Lower quality diets will properly sustain your kitten but could inhibit their growth and development. We recommend feeding your kitten a higher quality diet at least until they are 9-12 months of age. In adults, higher quality foods have less fillers and more digestible ingredients which promotes a better fur coat, healthier skin and produces less feces. Diet can be especially important in adult male cats. Some lower quality foods, such as Meow Mix and Alley Cat, are more highly associated with crystal production in the urine of cats. In male cats, crystals can cause a life-threatening obstruction. Your veterinarian can help determine the right food for your kitten.

## Basic Handling and Desensitization

Pet owners should handle their pet's mouth, paws, ears and body frequently. This will desensitize your kitten to having these areas handled later on. This makes pets more tolerant to general grooming behavior such as nail trims, combing, and ear cleaning better if they are handled.

Cats are self-groomers and do not require baths. If you decide you would like to occasionally bath your cat, it is best to start this behavior as a kitten so they will remain more tolerant of the action as an adult.



## Microchipping

A Home-Again microchip can also be placed under the skin of your pet. This microchip will allow for life-long recognition of your pet. Veterinarians, animal shelters and Humane Societies have a scanner that reads a specific number on the microchip that is assigned to your pet. This number will allow you to be contacted when your pet is discovered. Other services associated with the Home Again company can be purchased for a yearly fee, but your contact information will always be on record for your pet. Microchipping can be done at any age, but it is recommended being done during the spay/neuter.

## Spaying and Neutering

Spaying and neutering should be performed at 3-6 months of age. Besides preventing any unwanted litters and the complications that can occur with birth, this is an important step to ensure better health for your kitten later on in life. The procedure also prevents the development of annoying behavior that can drive an owner crazy.

***Microchipping provides life long identification of your kitten.***

***Spaying and neutering prevents infections and cancers of the reproductive tract and associated organs as well as reducing hormone-driven behaviors.***

***Many steps are taken to reduce the risks and pain involved in surgery to keep your pet as healthy as possible.***

***The surgical laser allows your kitten to be declawed with essentially no pain, bleeding or post operative complications.***

Spaying should be performed before your kitten has her first heat cycle. The risk of developing breast cancer later on in life significantly increases with each heat cycle. The risk of infections and cancer of the reproductive tract are eliminated as well by having your pet spayed. Many pet owners prefer to avoid the annoying behavior of their cat in heat too. Females can have their first heat cycle as early as 6-12 months of age.

Neutering your kitten eliminates the chance of reproductive tract diseases such as infections, cancers, prostate growth and perianal tumors. Spraying their territory with strong urine, roaming, aggression, fight wounds and other common male behaviors can also be reduced or eliminated by neutering your kitten before they sexually mature. These male behaviors can be learned the after they go through puberty as early as 6-12 months of age.

Some common myths associated with spaying/neutering your pet are that it causes your pet to become lazy or hyperactive, causes immature behavior, delays normal maturity or alters their personality. Spaying/neutering your kitten will not result in any of these misconceptions. Adult cats who are spayed/neutered may become more relaxed simply because they are not high strung from frequent heat cycles and reproductive instincts. Many people also believe their pets should experience either a heat cycle, puberty or a litter of kittens before being spayed/neutered. This simply increases the health risks your pet can have later on in life, allows for your pet to learn unwanted behavior, exposes them to potential birthing complications and increases the risk for pain and complications from spaying/neutering your kitten at an older age.

Spaying and neutering is a common procedure. Like with any surgery, there are risks associated with placed under general anesthesia. Your kitten's blood pressure, heart rate, oxygen level and breathing are closely monitored throughout the procedure to allow for early detection and treatment of any complication that may occur. A surgical laser is also used. The surgical laser cauterizes blood vessels and nerves making the incision essentially free of pain and blood loss. All surgical procedures are performed aseptically to minimize the risk of infections. Pain management is also important to us. Local numbing agents and pain relievers are used throughout and after the procedure to ensure proper pain management. A long-lasting pain relief injection and antibiotic injection are given with the surgery so that the owner does not have to worry about administering medications at home after the procedure.

## **Declawing Your Kitten**

Declawing is a popular procedure in cats. Owners have a choice between declawing all 4 paws or only the front paws. The procedure entails removing the last bone in each toe that is responsible for claw growth and then suturing the incision closed. Any kitten that is declawed is required to spend one night in the hospital to confine them while they are recovering from anesthesia. Some cats are disoriented from the anesthesia for the first night after a procedure which could result in them falling and breaking open the sutures. Many owners are surprised to see their kitten acting as if nothing was done to them the day after the procedure. Due to the incisions being sutured closed and the surgical laser, no special litter or shredded paper is required after the surgery. This prevents you kitten from being reluctant to use the litter box with a new, different type of litter in it.

Some people believe that declawing cats is painful, inhumane and unnatural. Common myths surrounding declawing include:

- Cats can no longer climb, protect themselves or hunt
- Cats become fearful and less affectionate after the procedure
- Cats are in pain after the procedure
- Cats are more likely to bite because they can no longer use their claws as a defense
- Cats are prone to back issues because they can no longer stretch and scratch

The truth is, declawed cats may be a little less effective but still capable of climbing, fighting and hunting. Between their teeth, speed, agility and surprisingly strong forearm batting, cats can still

***Declawing your kitten will not change their behavior or render them helpless.***

***Declawing your kitten prevents them from causing unintentional harm to you and your belongings. There are also medical reasons to declaw your kitten.***

***Little to no post operative care or medications are required when your kitten is declawed with a surgical laser.***

***It is important to teach your kitten***

perform all the normal behaviors a cat with claws can do. Declawed cats also do not appear to know they have been declawed so they continue to stretch as scratch as if their claws were present. Since they do not know their claws are gone, they do not need to overcompensate by biting. Studies done on cats behavior immediately and long after the procedure show no difference in the cat's aggression or affection towards humans. Great care is also taken to ensure pain is adequately addressed for the procedure. Many owners are surprised to find their cat is acting perfectly normal immediately after the procedure as if nothing was done to them.

Many people prefer to have their cats declawed for various reasons. Kittens especially can be destructive with their claws. They are very playful, curious creatures who only have their mouth and paws to play with. Kittens require time and development to be able to retract their claws. In the meantime, they frequently claw things without any intention and get their claws stuck in various things. Older cats also lose their ability to fully retract their claws and can have the same issues. Cats can be quite destructive to your family members and your belongs from normal cat behavior. Many cats also develop allergies that result in itchy skin and/or ears. The presence of claws can allow them to cause mild to severe damage to themselves. These medical issues are another reason to potentially declaw your kitten.

Our clinic uses the surgical laser as opposed to the traditional scalpel blade. The surgical laser vaporizes the tissue to cut and cauterize the tissue, blood vessels and nerve endings. The cauterizing action seals off the blood vessels and nerve endings so there is minimal blood loss and pain associated with the incision site. Any bacteria or other microscopic organisms at the incision site are also destroyed. Other pain relievers are utilized during the surgery as well including pain relievers used in the anesthetic drugs, local anesthetics and a long acting pain relief injection. Cats go home the next day acting as if no procedure had been performed on them. With the traditional scalpel, cats required bandages, more pain relievers and special litter in their litter boxes. Even with this extra care, the cats were often very sore and painful for a good week after the surgery. Many people who have experienced a declaw surgery with a scalpel are amazed at the difference in the cats after a surgical laser declaw.

Aftercare from the surgery is very minimal for the cats and their owners. All medications are given as medications so nothing needs to be administered orally at home. With the surgical laser and suturing the paws, the litter does not have to be changed to accommodate for the incisions either. This prevents possible issues with cats no using the litter box because they do not like the shredded paper that must be used with a scalpel blade procedure. If at all possible, you should try to prevent your cat from jumping down from high places. This can cause trauma to the fresh incision and may cause your cat limp for a day or so. Signs of infection (pain, redness, drainage and frequent licking of the paws) should be monitored for at home.

## **Training Your Kitten**

Kittens are very playful, interactive creatures who need to learn rules and boundaries just like any other creature. They will want to climb your curtains, scratch your furniture, bite your toes, and attack anything that moves. They have to be trained as to what behaviors and actions are unacceptable. Biting can be an especially difficult problem in kittens. Normally, the kitten's littermates would respond to your kitten biting them too hard by crying out and biting the kitten back. If you only have one kitten, they need to get this negative feedback from you to teach them how hard is too hard when they are biting. Otherwise, they will bite your hard enough to cause physical harm every time because they simply do not know that the bite causes you pain. You must cry out and put the kitten down to discontinue the interaction to teach your kitten not to bite. The best suggestion would be to get two kittens at the same time to so that they can play with and teach each other.

## **Kittens and their Litter Boxes**

Kittens have the innate sense to use a litter box when provided one so little training is required. Cats do have preferences for their litter boxes though. Most cats prefer to use clumpable, unscented litter as apposed to the clay, crystals or pellets. We recommended Tidy



***how to play properly so they do not unintentionally harm you.***

***Cats prefer large, uncovered litter boxes with clumpable, unscented litter.***

***You should have 1.5 litter boxes per cat in your house.***

***Kittens need to be partially confined or provided easy access to litter boxes until they are about 6 months of age.***

***Various foods, household products and objects will inevitably end up in***

Cats as a good clumping litter that controls odor better than most other brands. Cats also like large litter boxes without a cover. Male cats especially like to stretch out in the litter box. Long tubs (like under the bed storage containers) seem to work the best. Covered litter boxes can make cats feel trapped and unsafe. If your cat has a bad experience in a covered litter box (for example a loud noise that scares them while they are in it), that can deter your cat from going back into the litter box. As a general rule of thumb, cats should also be allowed 1.5 litter boxes per cat in the house. Whether this number is rounded up or down depends on how often you would like to clean out the litter boxes. Cats can be deterred from using their litter box if the litter box is too full. For example, a 3 cat household should have 4 litter boxes if they are cleaned out multiple times a week. Otherwise, 5 litter boxes is better if they are only cleaned out weekly.

Kittens are born with the instinct to use litter boxes, but the covering up of their excrement is a learned behavior. Some kittens will learn to cover up any bowel movement from their mother before going to their new home but not all kittens do. Another house cat can also train the kitten to cover up their feces if there is more than one cat in the house. Even if your kitten has learned to cover up the feces, they may not be very efficient at the behavior and frequently miss their feces entirely. You can cover the feces for your kitten immediately after they have a bowel movement and this may help your kitten learn the behavior.

One important consideration for kittens is that their small size and immature bladder control limits their ability to always get to the litter box. Kittens are like children in the fact that they will ignore or get distracted from the fact that they have to go to the bathroom during play and will suddenly, and very quickly, have to make it to the litter box. Kittens should either be confined to a part of the house with a litter box or have multiple litter boxes around the house until they are an adult cat. There should at least be one litter box per floor in multiple levels houses. Simple things such as closing doors to bedrooms, offices, and other rooms will help confine your kitten to an area close to the litter box until they have better control over their bladder. The smaller your kitten is, the more confinement or litter boxes spread out they will need. By the time your kitten is about 6 months of age, they should be fully capable of making it to a litter box. The confinement and extra litter boxes can be taken away at this point.



## **Kitten Proofing Your Home**

Kittens are similar to babies in the respect that need to be protected from things around the house that could pose a potential danger to them. Kittens are very curious creatures which can get them into trouble. They can get into very small spaces and tend to explore things with their mouths. Various foods, products and objects will inevitably end up in your kitten's mouth given the opportunity. Electrical wires of any kind should be kept tucked away safe from your kitten's reach. Food, plants and household products should also be kept out of your kitten's reach. Small, dark spaces, such as low cupboards, are enticing places for kittens to explore and hide in so keep these cupboards latched or remove any harmful substances from them.

Appropriate toys can be left out to encourage your kitten to focus on them as opposed to other inappropriate objects. Caution should be taken with any toy or household string objects. Kittens like to play with and chew on strings. If your kitten accidentally swallows a piece of the string, they will continue to swallow the whole string. Long strings that are ingested can cause serious, life threatening issues in your kitten's digestive tract. Any object that may be similar to cat litter should also be removed. For example, a kitten will inevitably urinate on any bean bag in the house because it feels exactly like cat litter. Removing bean bags and similar objects will help prevent your kitten from getting confused about their litter box training and also prevent you from the stress of inappropriate urination.

Many things around the house, many of which people do not commonly think about, can be toxic to your pet. Most will, at least, cause some digestive upset for your pet. We have included lists of potential toxic household products, foods and plants to be mindful of at any stage in your

***your kitten's mouth  
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***Kittens like to play  
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kitten's life. Common clinical signs that may require medical attention are also included. If your pet has ingested or been exposed to any of these items, call your veterinarian immediately.

## Foods Toxic to Cats

- Alcoholic beverages
- Caffeine ( coffee, soda)
- Garlic
- Onion
- Milk /Dairy Products
- Avocado
- Chocolate
- Grapes and Raisins
- Rhubarb
- Green Tomatoes
- Bread Dough
- Fruit pits (Cherry, Peach, Apricot)
- Macadamia nuts
- Xylitol sweetener (in gum, candy, etc)
- Bone-in Chicken or Fish

## Common Plants that are Toxic to Cats

- Aloe Vera
- Baby's Breath
- Carnations
- Cyclamen
- Gladiola
- Lillies
- Morning Glory
- Pothos
- Tulip/Narcissus
- Amaryllis
- Begonia
- Castor Bean
- Daffodil
- Hosta
- Milkweed
- Oleander
- Sago Palm
- Yew
- Azalea/Rhododendron
- Black Walnuts
- Chrysanthemum
- Dieffenbachia
- Ivy
- Mistletoe
- Poinsettia
- Tomato Plant

## Common Household Products and Medications that cause Toxicity in Cats

- Antifreeze
- Batteries
- Detergents
- Fertilizers
- Insecticides
- Paint
- Rat and Mouse Poison
- Zinc
- Wood Polish
- \*\*\*Dog Permethrin Flea Products (Hartz, Bio Spot, etc) \*\*\*
- Antidepressants
- Bleach
- Drain Cleaners
- Household cleaners
- Lead
- Paint Thinner
- Tobacco
- Ibuprofen
- Glow Stick Jewelry
- Aspirin (if taken more than 7 days in a row)
- Cold Medicine
- Expandable Foam Insulation
- Human NSAIDs (Ibuprofen, Aleve, Advil)
- Mothballs
- Play Dough
- Tylenol (Acetaminophen)
- Aspirin
- Aromatherapy Products

## Signs Your Pet Needs to See the Vet

- Vomiting (severe or for more than 24 hours)
- Diarrhea or straining to defecate
- Unintended weight loss
- Change in appetite (sudden, significant increase or decrease)
- Change in normal activity level (Lethargy, hyperactivity or restlessness)
- Limping (in more than one leg or lasting more than 2 days)
- Sudden inability to move back legs
- Crying in pain when touched
- Clumsy or disoriented behavior
- Seizures
- Any loss of consciousness
- Persistent coughing (especially at night)
- Any difficulty breathing or labored breathing
- Heavy breathing or panting at rest
- Any discoloration to the tongue and/or gums (blue, purple, pale, white, yellow)
- Sudden collapse
- Excessive drooling
- Sudden, frequent urges to urinate (generally with small amounts of urine produced)
- Sudden inappropriate urination or bowel movement in the house
- Crying out while urinating
- Change in urine smell or color
- Bloating abdomen
- Sneezing excessively
- Uncontrolled bleeding
- Nose-bleed or bruising anywhere in the body
- Any unusual odor
- Hair loss
- Sores on the skin or itchy skin
- Sore, itchy ears
- Runny, mucoid eyes or nose
- Squinting
- Change in color of the eye (focal spot or diffuse change)
- Significantly increased water consumption
- Inability, difficulty or reluctance to chew food (especially dry food)