



Cat flu is very common in unvaccinated cats and is very easily spread from cat to cat. It is rarely fatal, except in young kittens, but can be a real problem because the symptoms may be very difficult to clear up. Prevention is far better than cure - so to protect your cat make sure she is fully protected by regular vaccinations.

What is cat 'flu'?

Cat flu is usually caused by infection with a combination of one or more viruses (feline herpesvirus and feline calicivirus) and some bacteria. If one of the viruses gets hold then your cat's immune system may be so busy fighting it that other bugs (particularly bacteria) will also join in the attack.

How is the disease spread?

Rather like human flu, cat flu is spread by droplets of moisture containing the virus, passing from cat to cat - through sneezing, direct contact or shared food bowls. Infected cats spread virus in the saliva and nasal discharges (snot). The incubation period (the time for which a cat is infected and carries the disease before the symptoms develop) is up to 3 weeks. This means that it is quite possible for your cat to pick up the disease from another cat which seems healthy. People can spread the virus from cat to cat when handling them.

How do I know if my cat has 'flu'?

The signs of cat flu are very obvious and unlikely to be mistaken for anything else. In fact cat flu is often very similar to human flu starting with a high fever which may make your cat feel miserable and off her food, followed by the sneezing, coughing and sore eyes. Signs usually start to get better after about 7 days and, in most cases, your cat should be back to her old self in about 2-3 weeks. In some cats the disease can cause ulcers in the mouth making eating difficult.

Can I catch 'flu' from my cat?

No - the viruses that cause cat flu are quite different from those causing flu in humans. Your cat cannot catch the disease from you and you are not at risk of catching it whilst nursing her.

Can cat 'flu' be treated?

There is no treatment for flu in cats. Your cat will have to fight off the infection by herself and fortunately most, otherwise healthy cats, will do this within a few weeks. But cats, just like people, feel pretty miserable when they have the flu and plenty of nursing care is needed to help her get over it. Make sure she has somewhere comfortable and warm to lay and be sure she gets plenty of water or milk to drink. Although your cat may not want to eat for the first few days, you should try to tempt her to eat by offering tasty warm food to keep her strength up. You should always have your cat checked by your vet, and antibiotics may be prescribed to treat bacterial infections. If your cat is very congested try putting her in a warm steamy environment (like the bathroom with a hot shower running) to ease her breathing.

Always keep in close contact with your vet and let him know immediately if your cat appears to take a turn for the worse. If you have other cats living in your house take particular care to keep them away from the sick cat and always wash your hands after handling her. However, because she will have been infectious before the symptoms developed, it is likely that your other cats will already have been exposed to the disease and may develop symptoms.

Will my cat get better?

Most fit young cats will recover from flu after a few weeks - although in some cats that do get over the initial illness the problem never really goes away. These animals may be left with persistent problems such as runny noses. Sometimes these cats are on almost permanent medication to control their symptoms. The disease can be much more serious in young kittens, older cats and cats with other diseases, eg FeLV or FIV - these patients may need to be admitted to hospital for special treatment but, even so, may not survive.

How can I stop my cat getting 'flu'?

Cat 'flu'



The sensible precaution is to have your cat vaccinated to stop her getting flu in the first place. The flu vaccine that is given routinely as part of the annual vaccination programme will protect your cat against the common agents that cause serious disease. Vaccination does not always prevent infection, but it usually stops severe disease developing.

If you want any other information on health issues concerning your cat please contact All Creatures Veterinary Surgery on 0207 228 0648 and we will be happy to advise you.