

Humane Society of West Michigan

Health Concerns & Medical Treatment

Feline Upper Respiratory Infections

Your cat may have a cold when you get him home. Cats are subject to airborne virus disease that is very similar to the common cold experienced by humans. It is called URI (Upper Respiratory Infection), and we deal with it every day at the shelter. We do all we can do prevent its spread, including carefully disinfecting our kennels and vaccinating each cat with FVRCP. Despite our best efforts, some cats will come down with URI. When multiple cats are confined to one room, a single sneeze from a cat can expose all the others, just like a cold is spread through the classroom. Also, all the cats in the shelter are under stress just by virtue of being here, which lowers their resistance to illness.

If your cat begins to sneeze or has a runny nose or eyes within 6 days after you get him/her home, chances are that the cat has come down with URI. The virus is quite contagious to other cats, so if you can have any resident cats, keep them separate. You can expect symptoms to continue for 7-10 days and they may vary in intensity (just like a cold!). The cat may sneeze, have discharge from eyes and nose, drool and breathe with difficulty through his or her mouth. The cat may lose its appetite, and even stop drinking. If the discharge from your cat's eyes and nose is watery and the cat's temperature is normal, you are dealing with "simple" URI virus. Mucous and fever are indicators that a secondary bacterial infection is complicating the picture. With these conditions the cat most likely will need antibiotics. It is imperative that you seek veterinary treatment for the cat as soon as possible.

Can my other pets get URI?

URI is contagious to other cats. Vaccinating against URI is not 100% effective, so it is a good idea to isolate cats that are showing signs of URI, and wash hands after handling sick cats. We recommend isolating all new arrivals in your household for 8-10 days after adoption to give them a chance to settle in and make sure they are not coming down with anything. URI is not contagious to people or to animals other than cats.



What are signs of URI?

- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Red/Runny eyes
- Fever
- Sores on tongue/lips/nose
- Lack of appetite
- Decreased energy



What should I do if my new cat has URI?

- Provide your cat with a quiet, warm place to rest.
- Make sure the cat is eating. Sometimes with a stuffy nose they can't smell their food very well and may not want to eat. Offer smelly wet food to increase their appetite.
- If the cat is congested, use a humidifier or put the cat in the bathroom and run hot water in the shower for a few minutes a couple of times a day. Moderate to severe congestion is often a sign of a secondary bacterial infection, so contact your veterinarian to discuss treatment if this occurs.
- If any medicine has been prescribed, be sure to give the full course as directed, even if the symptoms seem to have gone away.

When should I contact my veterinarian?

With rest and care, many cats will recover from mild URI in one or two weeks. Sometimes cats need additional help, however. If your cat has any of the following signs, contact your veterinarian:

- Not eating for more than 24 hours.
- Green or yellow discharge from the nose or eyes.
- Difficulty breathing, especially panting or breathing with an open mouth.
- Depressed or unresponsive.
- Vomiting or diarrhea that lasts more than 24 hours.
- Little or no improvement after a week of care.

Feline Panleukopenia

Feline panleukopenia (also known as feline distemper) is a rare but infectious viral disease of cats. It attacks susceptible cats of all ages, but young cats and kittens seem to be most vulnerable. It is often fatal. The disease is not related to the virus of distemper of dogs nor does it infect people. It is a close cousin of the parvovirus of dogs and is itself a parvovirus.

Symptoms of panleukopenia include vomiting and diarrhea, lethargy, lack of appetite and sudden death. The disease strikes suddenly and progresses rapidly. All cats and kittens entering the shelter without a documented vaccination history are immediately vaccinated with a combination vaccine which provides excellent protection against this virus. Occasionally though, a cat will have been exposed to the virus prior to entering the shelter, or in that window of hours before the vaccination provides complete immune protection. For this reason we typically will see a few cases of panleukopenia in our shelter population each year. If you suspect that your newly adopted cat is showing symptoms of this disease, contact your veterinarian immediately.

Feline Infectious Peritonitis

Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP) is a disease that fortunately most cat owners will never need to know about first hand. It affects about one in 100 cats—most under the age of two.

The underlying cause of FIP is a type of coronavirus. This virus is very common in the feline population, and studies show that in most shelters and multi-cat environments 80-100% of cats have been exposed to this virus at some point. Most of these cats (about 99% of them) will never be sick from the virus. In a small portion (about 1%) of cats, however, the virus will be able to mutate into the form known as FIP. There is no test currently available that will allow one to determine which cats are going to be able to mutate the virus.

Cats that do mutate the virus become very sick. They commonly have fevers that are not responsive to antibiotics, and many of them accumulate fluid in their abdomen or chest. In the “dry” form, they can have eye inflammations (uveitis), kidney or liver disease, or neurological problems.

There is no good test to determine if a cat has the disease, although if a kitten has fluid in his chest or abdomen, there is a high likelihood that FIP is the cause. There is no treatment for the disease, and it is almost always fatal. Vaccination has not proven effective against the disease, and most cats are exposed to the coronavirus before they are 16 weeks old (the youngest that a cat can be vaccinated with this specific vaccine). The risk of contracting FIP is highest in kittens in the first year of life, and becomes very low after two years of age.

If your kitten shows any signs of illness, please take him to a veterinarian, who can provide more information about this devastating disease.

Feline Leukemia Virus

FeLV is a virus that causes a breakdown in a cat's immune system. This, in turn, causes the cat to become susceptible to many other diseases which a healthy cat might otherwise be able to fight off. All cats are tested for FeLV before adoption.

FeLV vaccines are reasonably effective in preventing persistent FeLV infection should your cat be exposed to the virus. No vaccine is 100% effective. The immune response produced by these vaccines will protect most cats from becoming infected with the virus. Consult your veterinarian regarding sufficient inoculations for your new cat or kitten.

HSWM TREATMENTS, PROCEDURES, VACCINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While at Humane Society of West Michigan, the cat you adopted may have received the following vaccines and/or treatments.

FVRCP

This is a standard vaccine administered to cats. It is sometimes referred to as the Distemper vaccine but it also includes Rhinotracheitis and Calici virus. Kittens and some cats may need additional doses administered by your veterinarian over a period of weeks to achieve maximum immunity from diseases. Until these are complete, it is best to limit the exposure of your kitten to other cats. Limit contact until you are certain that your new cat is healthy.

While at the shelter, all cats and kittens receive initial vaccines at admission to help ensure they receive maximum protection against illness and disease. Upon adoption, follow your veterinarian's advice regarding a vaccination and booster schedule for your cat or kitten.



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Worming

A dose of medicine to eliminate roundworms and/or tapeworms was given. Do not be surprised to see worms passed in your cat's eliminations. This is to be expected. Continued treatment and other types of parasite control may be provided by your veterinarian depending on your cat's individual needs.

Rabies Vaccine

All cats over four months of age are given a one year rabies vaccine. Follow your veterinarian's advice regarding follow up vaccination.

Antibiotics

When an animal is sick with an upper respiratory infection, we may administer a course of antibiotics. If your adopted cat is issued medication to go home with him at the time of adoption, it will be important that you continue the medication for the duration prescribed, and follow up with your veterinarian regarding recovery and the need, if any, for further medication or treatment. If you need us to show you how to properly give your animal medication, we will be happy to help.

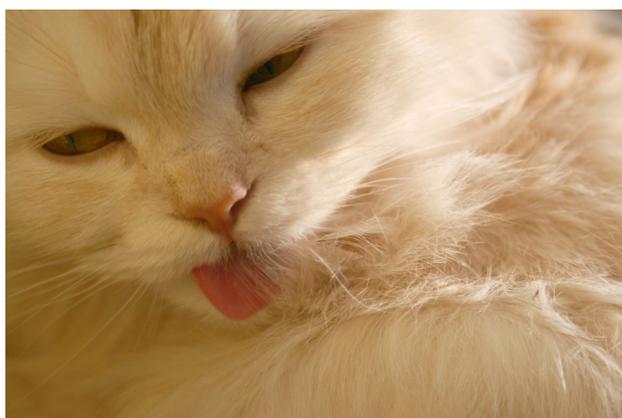
Upper respiratory infection is a nuisance but common in an environment with many cats of undetermined medical background. It is necessary to keep the new cat away from existing cats in the household until it is no longer showing symptoms.

Flea/Parasite Control

Many products exist that protect your cat from fleas, ticks and parasites. Your cat has been given a dose of Revolution. Ask your veterinarian for information about different approaches to flea control.

Spaying/ Neutering

Unaltered cats are spayed or neutered at HSWM prior to adoption. If your cat or kitten was altered recently, be sure to monitor the surgery site carefully for signs of swelling or discharge. Refer to the aftercare instructions included in your adoption packet for further information regarding alter procedures. All animals adopted from HSWM must be altered to prevent domestic animal overpopulation. Altering dogs and cats also keeps them healthier and easier to live with!



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Grooming

Persian and long-hair cats require ongoing grooming; it is necessary for their health and well-being. Grooming is not just for looks; it prevents painful mats and allows the skin to breathe. Neglecting this type of care can constitute neglect and cause needless suffering. If you are not able to accommodate your cat's grooming needs yourself, ask your veterinarian to recommend a good groomer.

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Conclusion

Animals in our lives provide a blessing and an opportunity to share the world with another species. It is a responsibility to be taken seriously. Working through behavior and medical issues will deepen your relationship with your animals and provide a valuable lesson to children and adults that the bond is indeed one that will endure tough times and last for the lifetime of your pet. "Getting rid" of an animal because it does not meet expectations, has not been taught good manners, or needs expensive medical care is a poor example of animal ownership.

When the match isn't right...

Sometimes a relationship is not successful. If keeping your companion animal becomes impossible, please contact HSWM for plans of placement or make an appointment at 616-453-8900 x 216 to return the animal to the shelter. You have three weeks from the time of adoption to return the animal at no cost and put your adoption fee towards another animal that is more suitable for your family. If you wish to place the animal yourself, please select the home with care. Once transfer of ownership has taken place, please notify HSWM with the new owner's information so that the microchip and owner information can be updated in our database.



All of us at Humane Society of West Michigan want to help you make the right pet choice and keep the loving bond for the lifetime of the pet. Please give us a call at **616-453-8900** with any questions you might have; *we are happy to help!*

SERVICES DIRECTORY

HSWM is dedicated to making our community a better place. Call (616) 453-8900 for more information or visit us online at www.hswestmi.org.

Animal Adoptions

Cats, dogs, birds, rodents, rabbits and more are available for adoption. (616) 453-8900 ext. 200

Animal Assistance

Food, supplies and vaccines are available to low income pet owners.

(616) 453-8900 ext. 210 or jtownsend@hswestmi.org

Behavior Help

If you have questions about problem pet behavior, contact our Behavior Specialist at (616) 453-8900 ext. 221 or namiko@hswestmi.org

Find a Home for your pet

If you are unable to keep your pet, HSWM may be able to place your pet in a new home.

Call first to schedule an appointment. (616) 453-8900 ext. 216