

Cat Flu

Owner information sheet





Cat flu is the common term for feline upper respiratory tract infection, and can be caused by a variety of viruses and bacteria. The main viruses to cause signs of cat flu are feline herpes virus (FHV) and feline calicivirus (FCV).

The most common clinical signs associated with cat flu are:

- Sneezing
- Nasal discharge (initially clear but can progress to mucus/pus)
- Conjunctivitis (Inflamed eyes) sometimes with ocular discharge
- Loss of appetite
- Corneal ulceration

Once infected with FHV, the cat will be infected lifelong and become a “carrier”. This means it could shed intermittently throughout its lifetime, though shedding is usually limited to times of stress. At times of viral shedding the cat might show mild clinical signs again.

Cats infected with FCV will continue to shed virus for several months after infection, and can remain lifelong carriers but most will eliminate the infection after several months. Young kittens and older cats are predisposed to more severe disease due to less effective immune systems and likely concurrent disease, especially for older cats. Vaccines are used widely throughout the veterinary world to build immunity to the viruses responsible for cat flu and reduce the severity of clinical signs. Unfortunately many cats will already have been infected before entry to the rescue centre and could be carrying the viruses, in addition there are many different strains of FCV so a vaccine might not work against all strains. The vaccine will help to reduce the clinical signs associated with cat flu as and when the cat is next affected.

The treatment for cat flu involves supporting the animal through the disease process and aims to reduce clinical signs affecting them. Where there are clinical signs associated with secondary bacterial infections, such as a gunky discharge from the eyes or nose, you might need antibiotics and/or anti-inflammatories from your own vet.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR MY RESCUE ANIMAL AND ME?

You are being given this information because there was an outbreak of “cat flu” in the cattery whilst your cat was in our care. Your cat might have displayed signs of cat flu such as sneezing, and might have received supportive medical treatment, or your cat might have been asymptomatic but been in the vicinity of symptomatic cats and therefore potentially be carrying the infection. You should read their veterinary history carefully, and go over it with your own vet, to see if your cat was clinically affected or not, but please remember that even if they were asymptomatic in our cattery they could still display clinical signs later on. Your cat has been vaccinated but unfortunately in times of stress or other disease, cat flu symptoms can recur, and could potentially also transmit the virus to other cats in the household, particularly if they are not vaccinated. Your cat can live a normal life but will need prompt veterinary attention if they are displaying any of the clinical signs above. Regular vaccination is also highly recommended and your own vet will be able to advise you on this long term.

Please remember that there are likely to be insurance exclusions on any policy you take out due to your cat already having had clinical signs of flu whilst in our care, particularly as FHV and FCV cannot be cured, but managed long term. This should be discussed for clarification with your chosen pet insurance provider prior to taking out a policy.