



## ANIMAL ANTICS

### Note for Pet Owners:

*Pet Patrol 365 provides this information for educational purposes only. You should seek the advice of your veterinarian if your pet is ill, as only they can correctly advise on the diagnosis and the recommended treatment for your pet.*

## CAT FLU



### What causes it?

Human influenza is caused by a single virus, but cat flu is a syndrome and can be caused by several different infectious agents known as pathogens. There are only three pathogens which are believed to be capable of causing cat flu on their own - namely the viruses Feline Calicivirus (FCV), Feline Herpesvirus (FHV) and the Bordetella bronchiseptica bacterium. The two specific viruses mentioned above can only cause disease in the cat family, while the bacterium Bordetella bronchiseptica is capable of causing disease in other species including dogs, namely kennel cough.

### What are the signs of cat flu?

Cat flu is like a human cold - it can cause a runny nose and eyes, and a sore throat. Other symptoms include aches and pains in the muscles and joints, mouth ulcers, dribbling, sneezing, loss of voice and fever. Cats tend to be dull and depressed and are reluctant to eat. Cat flu is not usually serious in adult cats, although they can be quite ill. However it can be serious, even fatal, in kittens, and in adult cats with other serious underlying illnesses.

### How does it spread?

Once infected, cats shed virus particles in nasal and eye discharges and in saliva. Although ill cats are the biggest source of infection, some healthy cats are carriers of the virus. Carriers do not suffer from the disease but they too can shed virus particles and infect other cats, particularly during periods of stress (e.g. re-homing, boarding at a cattery, attending a cat show etc.). Particles can survive for up to a week in the environment, so a cat does not even need to meet another to catch the illness. It can easily be spread by contact with infected feed bowls or toys, or on people's clothing after touching an infected cat.

### How is cat flu treated?

There are no effective antiviral drugs in common use. Antibiotics may help because, just as in human flu, once the virus has damaged the delicate lining of the nose and airways; bacterial infections can enter and cause complications, such as pneumonia.

Nursing care at home is important. A blocked nose and mouth ulcers may stop a cat eating and drinking, leading to dehydration, which can be particularly dangerous in kittens. Because your cat may have lost its sense of smell and have a sore throat, sloppy, strong-smelling foods should be offered. Suggestions include sardines, pilchards, roast chicken etc. Cream or ice cream may be taken if your cat has mouth ulcers. Cats that cannot eat may need to be hospitalised for treatment.

Encourage your cat to drink, as fluids help to loosen thick catarrhal secretions. Wipe away discharges from the nose and eyes regularly using salt water (a teaspoonful of salt to a pint of water). Steam inhalations help to loosen catarrh, so let the cat in the bathroom when you have a bath or shower, or offer inhalations of Olbas Oil by putting a few drops of oil in a container of warm water. Place this in the room with the cat, but not where the cat might drink it! Alternatively, put a few drops of Olbas Oil or eucalyptus oil on some cotton wool, and place in the room with the cat. Avoid direct contact, as it may be an irritant.

### Can it be prevented?

There are lots of different strains of virus, and, just as with human flu, the vaccine is not effective against them all. The vaccine, as with all vaccines, cannot prevent symptoms from occurring if the animal already has the infection at the time of vaccination. Even vaccinated cats can become carriers without showing any symptoms and can infect other cats.

Cat flu can be a real problem in any situation where a group of cats is kept (e.g. breeders, catteries, rescue centres etc.), particularly if new cats are often introduced. Preventing the entry of cat flu into a group of cats is a complex issue. At the very least, all new cats - even if they seem healthy - should be kept separate from the rest for at least two weeks, and they should be vaccinated before they mix with the others.

All cats with symptoms of cat flu should see a veterinary practitioner.

**ARTICLE BY PET PATROL 365**

**01342 851333 / 07974 728967**

[www.petpatrol365.co.uk](http://www.petpatrol365.co.uk)

© Pet Patrol 365