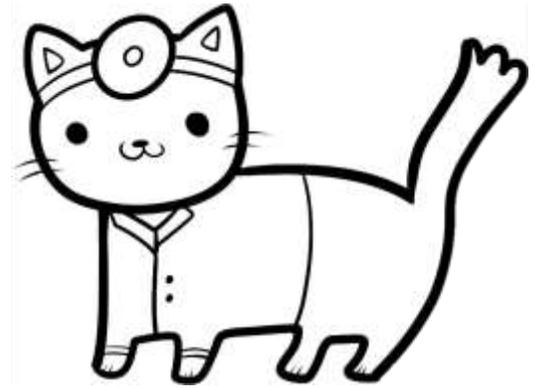


# GENERAL HEALTH CARE & DISEASES

## 4-H Cats Unit 2: Chapter 6



### I. Daily Health Check

- ◆ Health care for your cat begins with daily attention.
- ◆ Why daily grooming is important:
  - ✓ Keeps coat shiny & tangle free
  - ✓ Gets cat used to being handled
  - ✓ Allows you to check for health problems
- ◆ Here's what to look for:
  - ✓ Mouth - color of gums, tartar build-up, broken teeth.
  - ✓ Nose –discharge
  - ✓ Eyes – discharge, discoloration, nictitating membrane showing
  - ✓ Skin – lumps, swelling, hair loss, fleas or ticks
  - ✓ Body – weight, coat condition

### II. CAT'S VITAL SIGNS

#### A. Respiration

- ◆ A cat at rest normally takes 20–30 breaths per minute (BPM).
- ◆ Observe your cat while it is resting quietly.
- ◆ One rise plus one fall of the chest equals one breath.
- ◆ Count breaths for 30 seconds, then double that number for respiration rate.
- ◆ If the cat is ill, the breaths may become shallow & more rapid.

#### B. Pulse

- ◆ Lightly press against the inside of an upper hind leg, on the femoral artery.
- ◆ Count the beats for 30 seconds & double the number for pulse rate.
- ◆ The normal resting pulse rate is 112–160 beats per minute.

#### C. Temperature

- ◆ Use a rectal thermometer (NEVER an oral one).
- ◆ Shake it down & lubricate it with petroleum jelly, mineral, or cooking oil.
- ◆ Insert the thermometer gently but firmly in about 1".
- ◆ Twist it slightly to relax the rectal (sphincter) muscles.
- ◆ The thermometer bulb should be aimed straight towards the cat's head.
- ◆ Leave it in for about two minutes, then remove; wipe it off & read.
- ◆ A cat's normal temperature is 100.5°F–102.5°F.
- ◆ 105°F is a danger sign
- ◆ 108°F is life-threatening, requiring immediate cooling off in a cold water bath.
- ◆ Cats can suffer brain damage from high fevers just as humans can.

### III. VETERINARY TIPS

- ◆ Try to always use the same vet so they'll know your cat.
- ◆ Keeps your vet's number handy in case of emergencies.

- ◆ On the first trip to the veterinarian:
  - ✓ Observe how your cat is handled.
  - ✓ Check out the office. It should look clean, neat, & professional.
  - ✓ Look on the office wall for college & state license credentials.

## **IV. VACCINATIONS**

### **D. When to Start**

- ◆ At birth, a kitten receives protective antibodies from the mother's milk.
- ◆ By the time kittens reach 6-8 weeks of age, this protection has disappeared.
- ◆ Vaccinations are typically started at this time.
- ◆ Most vaccinations require a series of two or more shots to begin with followed by periodic boosters.

### **E. Required Vaccinations**

- ◆ Vaccinations are required in the 4-H program for the following conditions:
  - ✓ Distemper/Rhino (FVCRP)
  - ✓ Rabies
  - ✓ Leukemia  
(recommended)

## **V. DISEASES COVERED by VACCINATIONS**

### **A. Feline Panleukopenia Virus (FVCRP)**

- ◆ Abbreviated FPV
- ◆ Also known as Feline Infectious Enteritis (or feline distemper)
- ◆ Caused by a virus
- ◆ Highly contagious.
- ◆ Spread by direct contact with infected animals or their body discharges.
- ◆ It is long-lived & easily spread
- ◆ Cat can pick it up just by passing through an area where an infected cat has been.
- ◆ Has a high mortality rate once the cat becomes ill
- ◆ Entirely preventable by vaccination.
- ◆ Kittens should be immunized at 6 weeks of age, & again 3–4 weeks later.
- ◆ After that, a yearly booster is required.
- ◆ Symptoms of panleukopenia are:
  - ✓ Fever,
  - ✓ Vomiting & diarrhea,
  - ✓ Loss of appetite,
  - ✓ Depression,
  - ✓ Dehydration.
- ◆ Treatment includes:
  - ✓ Controlling dehydration
  - ✓ Preventing secondary infections such as respiratory illnesses.

### **B. Upper Respiratory Diseases**

- ◆ The 3 most common upper respiratory diseases are:

- ✓ Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis also known as feline herpes, (**FVCRP**)
- ✓ Feline Calicivirus (**FVCRP**),
- ✓ Feline Chlamydiosis, also known as pneumonitis (**FVCRP**)

- ◆ Rhinotracheitis- herpes virus.
- ◆ Calicivirus- virus very similar to the human cold virus.
- ◆ Chlamydiosis- rickettsia (a cross between a virus & a bacterium) called Chlamydia psittaci.
- ◆ All 3 are highly contagious, & young cats are especially susceptible.
- ◆ Usually transmitted by direct contact or airborne droplets.
- ◆ Contaminated cages, dishes, or litter pans can also cause the illness.
- ◆ The viruses are short-lived outside the cat's body, 24 hours to 3 days.
- ◆ The first symptoms are sneezing & coughing, followed by watery discharge from the eyes and/or nose.
- ◆ Later, the discharge may become thicker with the eye discharge containing pus & the nose becoming crusted.
- ◆ Other symptoms include:
  - ✓ Loss of appetite
  - ✓ Weight loss,
  - ✓ Listlessness
  - ✓ Weakness,
  - ✓ Depression,
  - ✓ Fever.
- ◆ Mouth & tongue ulcerations may occur, especially with Calicivirus.
- ◆ The main treatment is:
  - ✓ Warmth,
  - ✓ Rest,
  - ✓ Plenty of fluids (forced, if necessary) to prevent dehydration,
  - ✓ Nutritious food.
- ◆ Antibiotics are often given to prevent or combat secondary infections, especially pneumonia.
- ◆ Usually lasts 3-6 weeks.
- ◆ Cats rarely die from these illnesses unless they are very young or very old.
- ◆ Prevention is by vaccination of kittens at 6-8 weeks, with a booster 3–4 weeks later.
- ◆ A yearly booster is required.

### C. Rabies

- ◆ Rabies can infect any warm-blooded animals, including humans.
- ◆ It is highly contagious & is always fatal once the symptoms begin to show.
- ◆ Caused by a virus
- ◆ Transmitted through a bite wound or any break in the skin by which saliva enters the body.
- ◆ The virus enters the nervous system, travels to the spinal cord, then on to the brain where it causes nerve damage producing the symptoms.
- ◆ Incubation is usually 2-8 weeks, but in rare cases may incubate for several months.
- ◆ Death usually occurs 2-8 days after symptoms show.
- ◆ There are three stages of symptoms.

#### 1. Rabies – Stage One

- ◆ The first is the **prodromal** state marked by uneasiness, anxiousness, irritability, & sensitivity to noise & light.
- ◆ The cat may stop eating & drinking, yet urinate frequently.

#### 2. Rabies – Stage Two

- ◆ During the 2nd (**excitatory**) stage, the animal becomes excited & aggressive.
- ◆ It may have difficulty swallowing, although cats don't develop the hydrophobia (fear of swallowing water) that humans do.

- ◆ Often, a loud noise or sudden movement will set the animal off in a biting, scratching frenzy.

### 3. Rabies – Stage Three

- ◆ Finally, the third (**paralytic**) stage occurs.
- ◆ First the head & neck, then the rest of the body become progressively paralyzed, resulting in death.

### 4. Rabies – Forms

- ◆ There are two forms of rabies.
  - ✓ If the second, excitatory, stage is prolonged, while the paralytic stage is very short, it is known as “**furious**” rabies.
  - ✓ If there are few signs of excitement, but the paralytic stage is lengthy, it is known as “**dumb**” rabies.
- ◆ It is more usual for cats to suffer the furious form.

### 5. Rabies – Prevention

- ◆ Prevention of rabies is by vaccination.
- ◆ The first vaccination should be given no earlier than 3 months of age.
- ◆ Boosters are required every 1-3 years depending on the type of vaccine given.

### D. Feline Leukemia Virus(FeLV) vaccinations are not required, but they are strongly recommended.

- ◆ It is the major fatal infectious disease in cats today.
- ◆ FeLV is caused by a type of virus known as a retrovirus. It is transmitted by saliva, feces, & urine.
- ◆ The virus can only live 3–4 hours outside the cat’s body & is easily destroyed by disinfectants, so it is not as contagious as some other viruses.
- ◆ Induces cancer in the white blood cells & is linked to other illnesses such as anemia & lessening disease resistance.
- ◆ It eventually leads to death of the cat.
- ◆ A definite diagnosis of FeLV is made by doing a blood test.
- ◆ Once a cat has been exposed, one of three possibilities will occur:
  - ✓ the cat will not become infected;
  - ✓ the cat will become infected but will develop an immunity;
  - ✓ the cat will develop symptoms after an incubation period of anywhere from a few weeks to several years.
- ◆ If a cat is known to have been exposed but tests negative, it should be retested a few more times during the next 8–12 months.
- ◆ If a cat tests positive, but shows no symptoms for a few months, it should be retested.
- ◆ Meanwhile, the cat should be isolated from other cats to prevent further spread of the disease.
- ◆ If the cat tests negative on the second test, it is no longer a danger to others.
- ◆ A cat who tests positive for FeLV & is showing symptoms should be euthanized, or at least completely isolated from other cats.
- ◆ Symptoms include anemia, fever, vomiting, diarrhea, & breathing problems.
- ◆ Cats may also develop tumors, known as lymphosarcomas.
- ◆ It is recommended that all cats be tested for FeLV.
- ◆ Cats testing negative should be immunized, with annual booster vaccinations.

## VI. OTHER DISEASES

### E. Feline Immunodeficiency Virus

- ◆ Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) is caused by a retrovirus.
- ◆ It is more closely related to the virus that causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) in humans.
- ◆ FIV virus depresses the immune system & results in secondary illnesses such as conjunctivitis, chronic diarrhea, or respiratory problems.
- ◆ If a cat tests negative for FeLV, FIV should be suspected, & a test has now been developed for detecting it.
- ◆ There is no cure for FIV & no vaccine is available for prevention.

- ◆ The best way to avoid the illness is to keep the cat indoors & away from other cats that may be infected.

#### **F. Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP)**

- ◆ (FIP) is caused by a corona virus.
- ◆ The disease is fairly rare, but when it does occur, it is generally fatal.
- ◆ The virus spreads rapidly, but is easily killed by disinfection.
- ◆ Any cat suspected of carrying this virus should be isolated from other pets.
- ◆ Symptoms include loss of appetite, weight loss, & fever.
- ◆ The virus attacks many parts of the cat's body, & eritonitis\* accompanied by accumulation of fluid is a common result. \*(inflammation of the membrane lining the abdominal or chest cavity),
- ◆ There is no effective treatment & no recommended immunization is available.

#### **G. Feline Infectious Anemia**

- ◆ Caused by bacteria called rickettsiae, although it also occurs as a secondary infection to FeLV or FIV.
- ◆ Spread of the disease is thought to be caused by blood-sucking insects, primarily fleas.
- ◆ Symptoms include depression, vomiting, dehydration, weakness, loss of appetite, weight loss, & pale mucous membranes.
- ◆ Positive diagnosis is made by blood testing.
- ◆ The illness is not usually fatal, & is treatable with antibiotics which must be given for at least three weeks in order to prevent recurrence.

#### **H. Feline Urologic Syndrome (FUS)**

- ◆ Feline Urologic Syndrome (FUS) refers to inflammation of the bladder (cystitis) and/or the formation of stones in the lower urinary tract (urolithiasis).
- ◆ Male cats, especially neuters, are more prone to serious symptoms than females.
- ◆ Prompt veterinary treatment is mandatory because delaying even a few hours can lead to uremic poisoning, kidney failure, & death.
- ◆ FUS may be caused by a bacterial infection, but the more common suspect is a high concentration of minerals in the urine which leads to formation of uroliths(stones) which enlarge to the point that they plug the urinary tract.
- ◆ Feeding the cat a diet high in minerals ("ash"), particularly magnesium, may be the primary cause, although research is still being done on this.
- ◆ Symptoms of FUS include bloody urine, frequent urination, or the inability to urinate.
- ◆ If the urethra is partially or completely blocked, the cat may raise on its haunches instead of squatting to urinate.
- ◆ It may also cry out because of the pain, & if any urine is passed at all, it will probably be bloody.
- ◆ Never try to treat the cat by applying pressure to the bladder, as it could rupture. The cat should be taken to the veterinarian immediately.
- ◆ The vet will relieve the cat by emptying the bladder, either by gentle manipulation or, by passing a catheter through the urethra into the bladder.
- ◆ If that doesn't work the urine may be withdrawn by suction with a needle directly through the abdominal & bladder walls.
- ◆ If all else fails, surgery is performed to provide a new urethral opening (urethrostomy).
- ◆ FUS is likely to recur, so it will be necessary to continue observation for symptoms & continue the proper diet.
- ◆ Treatment includes antibiotics & dietary & a higher fluid intake.
- ◆ Some brands of cat food are noted for low magnesium. Check the labels on the cans or packages.
- ◆ Other ways to help avoid FUS include:
  - ✓ Encouraging more exercise,
  - ✓ Preventing obesity,
  - ✓ Keeping a clean litter box,
  - ✓ Always having plenty of fresh water available