

Vaccination FAQs



Some general information about vaccination is included below. The sections in italics relate specifically to Cats Protection (CP)'s current preferred vaccine product. To find which vaccine is CP's current preferred product, please check the commonly ordered product list.

What are the core and non-core vaccinations for cats?

Core vaccinations protect animals from severe, life-threatening diseases that have global distribution. Core vaccines for cats in the UK are those that protect against feline parvovirus (FPV), feline calicivirus (FCV) and feline herpesvirus-1 (FHV-1).

Non-core vaccines are those that are required by only those animals whose geographical locations, local environment or lifestyle places them at risk of contracting specific infections. Non-core vaccines for cats in the UK include those that protect against feline leukaemia virus (FeLV), a vaccine which forms part of the minimum veterinary standards for CP adoption centres and which may also be offered by branches if funds allow.

When should a cat be vaccinated?

Strategies for vaccination in a rescue (multiple cat) environment will be different from those of the privately owned cat.

Vaccination recommendations given by the manufacturer are based on a minimum duration of immunity and are the timeframes which have been tested in order to show that the vaccine works, and in order for the product to be licensed for use (for a vaccine to be licensed, the manufacturer must show that the vaccine is both safe and efficacious/effective).

Cats and kittens should be vaccinated as soon after entering Cats Protection's care as possible after a veterinary health check and when the datasheet for the vaccine brand recommends.

When annual vaccinations have lapsed, CP would like all cats to receive a full course of vaccination given three weeks apart. The question of how long overdue is 'overdue' will be left to the attending vet's discretion.

Merial Purevax can be given from eight weeks of age.

Please discuss with your vet the timing of second vaccination in CP kittens.

On the whole it may be preferable to book the second vaccination for all cats (including kittens vaccinated at eight weeks) three weeks after the first. Then if the cat/kitten is homed before the second vaccination has been given, the three-week date can be written on the second vaccination certificate. This gives up to a week afterwards for the owner to get booked in (and for CP honour the offer to supply the vaccine), in line with the datasheet recommendation.

There may be instances where the vet may wish to delay the vaccination in kittens given their first vaccine at eight weeks of age, so that they don't receive their second until four weeks later (at 12 weeks of age) and your vet can guide you accordingly. If so, for the purposes of completing the second vaccination certificate (if the kitten is adopted prior to it receiving its second vaccination), ask the vet to guide on how long over the four-week datasheet recommendation they would be prepared to administer the second vaccination, and if necessary modify the number of days CP will honour the offer to supply second vaccination (down from the maximum of one week).

What if a cat only gets one vaccination injection?

Although there will be a level of circulating antibodies, which is far better than not having any at all, the immune response may not be as effective when challenged with disease as if the cat had received the second injection of the primary course. Therefore, the cat may potentially still have some susceptibility to disease because it will have lower levels of antibodies, and also these levels may circulate or be active for a shorter time period. By receiving the full primary course, the cat receives more protection against the diseases for which it is vaccinated.

If a cat is homed by the branch after it has been given its first vaccination, what about its second vaccination?

As it is recommended that the same brand of vaccine is used for the first and second vaccines, it is advisable that if a cat is homed before its second vaccine, the owner takes it back to the Cats Protection vet or another vet using the same brand, where the same vaccine can be used to complete the primary course (a donation or fee cannot be asked for because of VAT issues). See the relevant section of the *Veterinary manual* and use the Proof of Second Vaccination form. Otherwise, the new owner's vet may advise that a full primary course be started again at the expense of the new owner.

What happens if you don't know a cat's vaccination history? Is the cat likely to get an overdose?

We would always recommend that you speak with the vet if you have any concerns over specific cats when they are examined.

Cats should always receive a vaccine while in Cats Protection's care, even if its vaccination history is unknown. This is not only to offer the new cat some immunity against potential disease while in care, but also to protect other cats already in care. Vaccination should also help reduce disease outbreaks.

How should we go about policing vaccinations of homed cats?

Although having one vaccination injection is better than none, the cats will have a lower degree of protection and may be more susceptible to disease, so ensuring a homed cat has had its second vaccination is worth doing.

When an owner has taken their cat to have its second vaccination, ask them to send in a copy of the vaccination card or provide a Proof of Vaccination form to fill in and send back to the branch/adoption centre once vaccinated. Make a note of the due date of the second vaccination of each homed cat, allowing for a few days either side. If you have not received proof of the second vaccination, then contact the owners to see if the cat has had its second vaccination. This is also a perfect opportunity to find out how the cat is settling in and if there are any issues that you may be able to help them with, such as problems integrating the cat into the household.

Ultimately, the new cat legally belongs to the owner so we can't force them to have the cat vaccinated with the second vaccines or any subsequent booster vaccinations.

What are the effects of giving a different brand of vaccine for the second injection?

Ideally, cats should receive the same brand of vaccine for both the first and second vaccination because some components and strains of the organism may differ between vaccine brands.

Where a cat has received a different brand of vaccine for its first vaccination before coming into CP care, a second vaccination with Purevax should be given three to four weeks later. Ideally a further Purevax vaccination should be given three to four weeks later to complete the course, but this will be at the treating vet's discretion.

The parvovirus and feline herpesvirus vaccines do not greatly differ between brands because of the limited number of strains of each of these diseases, but there are many feline calicivirus (FCV) strains

and different brands may protect against different strains – so potentially if the cat receives two injections, each of which act against different strains, the cat may have an overall lower level of protection against FCV and the effectiveness of vaccination is reduced.

This is particularly important with vaccination against FeLV because different FeLV vaccines use different technologies and efficacy (effectiveness) levels vary between vaccines. Potentially, using different brands of vaccine for the first and second vaccine could affect the cat's level of protection against this disease.

What about giving a third injection in the vaccination course?

WSAVA (World Small Animal Veterinary Association) guidelines recommend that the vaccination schedule for the core vaccination of kittens should be completed at 16 weeks of age or older. By this recommendation, when vaccination is started at eight or nine weeks of age, vaccinations are repeated every three to four weeks to end at 16 weeks of age or older. This means a course of three vaccinations is needed. When a vaccination is started at six or seven weeks of age (for example, in the face of a local outbreak of disease), a course of four primary core vaccinations would be administered to finish at 16 weeks or older. Therefore the number of primary core vaccinations will be determined by the age at which vaccination is started. A number of vets have since adopted this protocol as part of their routine vaccination of kittens.

WSAVA has issued this guidance in response to some studies which suggest that the presence of maternal antibodies in the kitten's blood will interfere with the effects of vaccination. It may take 16 weeks for these maternal antibodies to disappear. However, WSAVA acknowledges that the studies were carried out in a relatively low number of purebred cats, and that the guidance may not be fully applicable to the wider feline population.

Merial has not changed their advice to owners and their datasheet recommends two vaccinations in the core vaccination course, given at eight to nine and 12 weeks. They do not advise a third vaccination routinely. Our current guidance to both our branches and adoption centres (and also to vets via our *Veterinary Guide*) is that we recommend that vaccination is done in accordance with the manufacturer's datasheet.

Currently, CP kittens and cats should be vaccinated only twice if still in CP care when the second vaccination is due, unless there is a particularly high risk such as an outbreak locally.

Once cats are homed, the new owner's vet may recommend a third vaccine. The decision to administer a third vaccine would be made by the new owner and this would be paid for by the new owner. It is advisable to inform new owners about this at the time of homing.

Should we vaccinate confirmed FIV-positive cats, when they will be in an indoor environment?

Yes. Healthy FIV positive cats in CP care are at more risk of contracting an infectious disease and so in most cases vaccination should be given.

However, the decision on whether a FIV-positive cat should be vaccinated should be made by the attending vet based on a risk vs benefit analysis for the particular case.

What is the procedure for vaccinating pregnant and lactating cats?

Pregnant queens should not be vaccinated except in exceptional circumstances, when it is felt appropriate by the attending vet. Some vaccines can harm the unborn foetus.

Lactating queens should be vaccinated as when in CP care they are at more risk of contracting infectious disease. However, the decision on whether a lactating queen should be vaccinated should ideally be made by the attending vet based on a risk vs benefit analysis for the particular case.

If vaccinated, it is probably best for both queen and kittens if this is undertaken a week after giving birth.

Some of our fosterers own cats aren't vaccinated, is this okay?

The CP fosterer must have their own cats vaccinated due to the number of fostered cats that will be coming into the home that could be harbouring any number of diseases. Their own cats will be unprotected and are therefore more likely to contract a contagious disease and if they do pick up a disease, then the more chance a fostered cat has of being infected as well.

Not all diseases are spread by direct contact. Some are airborne and some can be passed on, via the fosterer's clothes, shoes or hands. This is especially so where a fosterer houses cats indoors or where the owned cats are able to come into close proximity of the fostered cats.

Please note that fostered cats should never be allowed to mix with owned cats or with other fostered cats not from the same household. CP strongly recommends routine preventative health care which includes vaccinations and so every precaution should be taken to ensure those cats' health and welfare needs are covered. Extra stringent attention to hygiene and suitable overclothes etc should be used by a fosterer who has unvaccinated cats.

What if the cat isn't homed before the second vaccination is due?

Ideally Cats Protection should ensure that the second vaccination is given to ensure that the cat is given the complete primary course. Otherwise, the new owner may need to start the entire course again.

What should we do if the owner can't get the cat to our Cats Protection vet for its second vaccination?

Hopefully, this won't be a common problem. We would recommend that they see if any vets in their area use the same vaccine brand so they can complete the course. Alternatively, if the new owner is in another adoption centre/branch's area, then you could liaise with them to see if the owner could use their Cats Protection vet and vaccines.

If this is not possible, the owner may need to start the full primary course again at their own vets.

Please remember that between the first and second vaccine, there is only a window of three to four weeks, otherwise a completely new course may be required to ensure the cat receives full immunity.

What is the length of the expiry on vaccines? What if we don't use all the vaccines before they expire?

Please see the individual vaccine expiry dates, as each type of vaccine may vary. Generally, vaccines have a shelf life of about 18 months from date of manufacture to date of expiry.

To ensure you aren't left with stock that you can't use, take care with stock control and order the minimum quantity of vaccines required. Vaccines can be delivered on a next day delivery basis so there shouldn't be any reason to have more than one or two boxes in stock at a time. We recommend keeping in regular contact with your veterinary practice regarding all CP stock stored on site to ensure they are getting the most out of the products that are purchased and know when to re-order.

If you do find yourself with stock that is near to its expiry date, if your veterinary practice uses the same brand of vaccines, ask them if they will swap the CP ones for some that will expire at a later date. They may well be able to use them before you and save you having to dispose of the out-of-date vaccines.

Do the Merial Purevax vaccines come with syringes and needles?

Vaccines are delivered with syringes and needles. Should you encounter any problems, please contact the wholesaler who provided the product.

What is the difference between killed and live vaccines?

Vaccines may be either killed (containing no living organism) or can be 'modified live' – containing a live form of the organism that is able to replicate but, by modification, has been rendered incapable of causing disease. Killed vaccines usually contain an 'adjuvant' – an ingredient that is combined with the killed organism to help stimulate a good immune response. Modified live vaccines do not require an adjuvant as the replication of the organism itself stimulates a good immune response. Purevax is a modified live vaccine. Killed vaccines were previously advocated to avoid risk of reversion to virulence (causing disease), but the ABCD (European Advisory Board on Cat Diseases) and WSAVA (World Small Animal Veterinary Association) guidelines are now recommending live vaccine for the beneficial prevention of parvovirus in rescue animals.

What diseases should CP cats be vaccinated against?

CP cats used to be vaccinated against *Chlamydomphila felis* but the Veterinary Department has been considering the benefits of including this as a core vaccine.

- *Chlamydomphila* is not a recommended core vaccine by the ABCD (European Advisory Board on Cat Diseases) or the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA)
- *Chlamydomphila* is an intracellular bacteria so does not survive long in the environment and it is easily killed with disinfectants. Transmission is via close contact of infected cats. Cats Protection's procedure of housing cats separately or in small groups along with our robust hygiene, disinfection and cleaning protocols for cats in our care should greatly reduce the risk of transmission of this disease in our care
- Vaccination is not sterilising so will only reduce the clinical severity of disease seen if a vaccinated cat becomes infected with the bacteria
- Unlike many of the diseases we vaccinate against, *Chlamydomphila* can be treated with a three to four week course of antibiotics

Taking this into account, it has been decided that *Chlamydomphila* is no longer required to be part of the standard vaccination protocol, but could be given on a case by case basis if prescribed by the adoption centre/branch vet. Its use may be considered appropriate in situations where cats are being housed in large communal groups or in the face of an outbreak, however in line with CP policy, these situations are not the norm.