

**The ABCs of Feline Vaccinations**  
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## Individual Vaccination Schedules

There is no ‘one size fits all’ schedule for vaccinating kittens. The vaccination schedule is individualized based on factors that determine the risk of disease, such as:

- Health status
- Age
- Lifestyle (going outdoors now or in the future, etc.)
- Number of cats in the home
- Boarding when the owner is away (many boarding kennels/catteries allow some cats to mix in groups)
- Breeding plans

Maternally-derived antibodies (MDA) start to wane by 6 to 8 weeks of age in most kittens

- That is why that is the recommended starting age for FVRCP vaccinations.
- If a kitten still has high levels of MDA at the time of any vaccination, the effect of the vaccination may be neutralized by those antibodies.
- Studies suggest that many kittens still have interfering MDA at 20 weeks of age.
- Recent feline vaccination guidelines may recommend the final vaccination in the kitten series at over 20 weeks of age or at 6 months of age to ensure effective immunity for the largest number of kittens possible.

## My Kitten Vaccination Guidelines

My kitten vaccination guidelines have been tailored to the needs of my patient population (Table 2).

- Another hospital’s vaccination schedule or recommended vaccinations could be different depending on their patient population and the type of vaccines they use.
- Note that a kitten is not considered fully protected until two to three weeks after the last vaccination in the series has been given.
- I have chosen **not to recommend** a last vaccination at 6 months of age.
  - It may not be practical to ask owners to return when the kitten is 6 months of age for vaccination.
- I prefer giving the last FVRCP vaccination **at or older than 20 weeks** of age as this will protect the majority of kittens.
  - There are exceptions where owners may not be able to get kittens vaccinated according to our recommendations. In those exceptions, the last FVRCP vaccination may be in the 16 to 20 week age range, which is not ideal (fewer kittens will have protective titres than when the last vaccination is given at or older than 20 weeks) but it may be the only option.
- Spay or neuter surgery can be combined with the last vaccination to reduce the number of veterinary visits.
- It is important that all team members speak with one voice and avoid giving conflicting advice to cat owners.

I recommend all kittens receive FVRCP, FeLV, and rabies vaccinations (where rabies vaccination is mandated by law).

- The veterinarian who starts a kitten vaccination series should note in the kitten’s medical record how many vaccinations are needed (based on age at first vaccination) and which vaccines are needed. This ensures the owner, other veterinarians, and all team members will follow the same plan for each kitten.
- The next vaccination appointment should be booked before the owner leaves.

### What if a kitten is late for a follow up vaccination?

- Follow up vaccinations should be given 3 to 4 weeks apart for the best immune response.
- At the most, that window can be extended to no longer than 6 weeks.
- If the length of time since the previous vaccination is longer than 6 weeks, essentially the series must be restarted.

<b>Table 1: My recommended kitten FVRCP vaccination schedule</b> (based on four weeks between vaccinations and the last vaccination at or older than 20 weeks).					
<b>Age at 1st vaccination</b>	<b>Follow up #1</b>	<b>Follow up #2</b>	<b>Follow up #3</b>	<b>Follow up #4</b>	<b>Total number of vaccinations needed</b>
6 weeks	10 weeks	14 weeks	18 weeks	22 weeks	5
7 weeks	11	15	19	23	
8 weeks	12	16	20		4
9 weeks	13	17	21		
10 weeks	14	18	22		
11 weeks	15	19	21		
12 weeks	16	20			3
13 weeks	17	20			
14 weeks	18	21			
15 weeks	19	22			
16 weeks	20				2

After finishing the kitten FVRCP vaccination series, the first adult booster is given **one year after** the last kitten vaccination (not at one year of age). Future vaccinations are given **every three years**.

#### **Rabies** (where mandated by law)

- Initial dose: ideally at 12-16 weeks of age but can be older
  - No follow up dose is needed as one vaccination achieves good protection
- Adult boosters: 1 year after the initial dose, then annually

#### **Feline leukemia virus**

Vaccination against FeLV is unique as it is considered a **core vaccination for kittens** but non-core for adult cats. This is because kittenhood is when most cats get infected, so it is important to protect kittens at their most vulnerable age.

- First dose at 8-12 weeks of age is ideal but it can be given to older kittens
  - Follow-up: a single dose 3-4 weeks later
- If the adult cat is at risk of infection, the first booster is given one year after completion of the initial series and annually thereafter.

## Adverse Reactions from Vaccinations

### Common but rarely serious reactions

- **Localized reactions:** Pain, swelling, and redness at the injection site. You might notice a small bump where the injection was given. This typically resolves on its own within a week.
- **Mild fever:** A slight increase in body temperature as the immune system responds to the vaccination. The fever typically lasts less than 24 hours.
- **Lethargy:** The kitten might seem a bit tired for a day or two.
- **Reduced appetite:** Some kittens may eat less for a short period after vaccination.

### Rare but potentially serious reactions

- **Anaphylaxis:** A severe allergic reaction that can occur within minutes to hours after vaccination. Symptoms include facial swelling, vomiting, difficulty breathing, and collapse. Anaphylaxis requires immediate veterinary attention.
- **Injection site sarcoma:** A rare type of cancer that can develop at the site of a vaccine injection (or the site of some other injections). Most vaccines today have a lower risk of causing severe inflammation and/or cancer than in the past.

**2020 AAHA/AAFP Feline Vaccination Guidelines.** Authors A.E. Stone and others. Published in the Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery in Sep 2020, volume 22 (issue 9): pages 813-830.

Available for free at: <https://catvets.com/resource/aaha-aafp-feline-vaccination-guidelines>