

VACCINES save kittens' LIVES

Doctors have a way to protect pets from diseases: vaccines. Here's why our hospital recommends them.

Back to basics: What's a vaccine?

The history starts with an epidemic of smallpox, which killed millions of people. In 1796, a physician named Edward Jenner noticed that the milk maids, who were routinely exposed to cowpox, did not get sick with smallpox. He wondered whether their exposure to cowpox protected them—and the idea of vaccination was born. A vaccine exposes the im-

mune system to inactive or incomplete disease-causing agents to train the immune system to quickly and effectively respond when exposed to the real thing.

If we expose cats to vaccines, if and when their immune systems face the real disease, they can fight it more easily. Think of vaccination like a training gym where athletes prepare their bodies and minds for actual competition.

cause we don't want to gamble with protection, veterinarians and other medical professionals believe it's far better to vaccinate too often than not enough.

While kittens receive some immune protection from their mother after they're born, that doesn't last for a cat's entire kittenhood. Eventually, kittens need to develop their own protection, and that's where vaccines come in. Since maternal immunity can interfere with the effectiveness of vaccines, we repeat them to make sure they're present when the kitten's own immune system takes over. This timeline varies between individual cats, so we follow guidelines to protect as many kittens as possible.

Which vaccines does my kitten need?

When a disease is widespread, dangerous—or both—researchers develop a vaccine against it. Vaccination choices are based on an individual kitten's lifestyle and risk factors. Your veterinary team can tell you which vaccines are appropriate and how they can be given.

Why does my kitten need to repeat vaccines ("boosters")?

We know that an immune system "remembers" diseases from vaccines, but we don't know how long the memory is for each individual animal. Be-

Are vaccines safe?

There have been cases of cats developing cancer in a spot where they've received a vaccination. The risk is small, however—especially for kittens—and it's better to vaccinate too often than not enough. Vaccination has saved innumerable lives, both human and animal. There are also isolated cases of allergic reactions, but these are rarely life-threatening when treated appropriately. It is important, however, that kittens not be randomly vaccinated outside of published recommendations. Vaccines are not one-size-fits-all and should be tailored to the individual kitten.

