

# Cat Flu Info Sheet



## What is cat flu?

Cat flu (or feline upper respiratory tract disease) is a common disease, similar to a human cold but for a cat. It can be caused by a number of different viruses, with the most common (about 80% of cases) being Feline Herpesvirus or Calicivirus. It is generally not serious with appropriate vet diagnosis and following vet advice but if left untreated and without monitoring, it can cause severe health issues and even death.

## What are the symptoms of cat flu?

The affected cat/kitten may experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Weeping eyes/discharge from eyes
- Loss of appetite
- Tongue ulcers (particularly calicivirus)
- In rare cases, a cat/kitten may limp (calicivirus)
- Red eyes (particularly chlamydia)
- Difficulty breathing

Symptoms can vary in severity with some affected cats only experiencing occasional sneezing whilst others may result in life-threatening complications.

***If your foster animal is experiencing any cat flu symptoms, contact the AWL NSW vet clinic (Kemps Creek carers only) or your branch Welfare Officer (AWL NSW branch carers only) during business hours.***

## How is cat flu diagnosed?

In most cases, a vet will diagnose cat flu based on clinical signs and observing symptoms. In rare cases, a swab may be taken from the cats mouth and sent off to a lab for confirmation.

## How is cat flu spread?

The most common cause of cat flu is from a cat inhaling droplets that were coughed or sneezed out by another, infected cat. The virus can spread directly (eg. infected cat coughing on a healthy cat) or indirectly. It can be spread from an otherwise healthy cat sharing food/water bowls with an infected cat, sharing bedding or from any surface coming in contact with an infected droplet and then transmitting the virus to a healthy cat. Eg. you may pat or cuddle a cat with cat flu and then pat or cuddle another cat (without washing hands or changing clothing) and the other cat could get infected from this.

Cat flu can only be transmitted between cats and not other species. Humans cannot catch cat flu and a human cold cannot transfer to a cat. However, humans can transfer cat flu between cats as per above.

Some infected cats however, may be in a 'carrier state' and not show any clinical signs. These carrier cats are only infectious to other cats when they are shedding the virus. This may be for a few weeks or months after they've displayed symptoms of cat flu, it could be intermittent or it could be continuous.

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Stress (which can be caused by introducing a new animal to a house or changing the environment) from a previously infected cat can increase the chance of the virus shedding as well.

## **If I am fostering a cat/kittens with cat flu, will my own cat(s) get it?**

In most cases, the virus won't spread to your own cat(s) as long as you take the correct precautions.

If you have existing cats and are fostering cats/kittens with cat flu, we highly recommend that you keep the foster cats in a separate room. Wash your hands with soap immediately after patting them or touching anything in their room and change clothing if it comes in contact with the infected cat. Consider door handles and infected droplets that you may step in (eg. from cat sneezing on the floor) and then step outside the room.

## **How do I clean the environment to ensure there is no cat flu in it?**

Wash bowls, litter tray and other items with disinfectant regularly and also immediately after foster cats have left your house. Clean hard surfaces with disinfectant and leave the room to settle for a week before putting other animals in it. Sun can also help to kill cat flu in the environment and you can leave the window open to air out the room.

## **How long can cat flu stay in the environment?**

Cat flu can stay in the environment for up to about 7 days in ideal conditions.

## **How is cat flu prevented?**

The standard F3 vaccination covers most strains of cat flu. Make sure your cats are up-to-date with vaccinations. Whilst a vaccinated cat can still get cat flu, the symptoms are likely to not be as severe as an infected, unvaccinated cat.

As cat flu is spread from other cats, keeping your cat indoor-only can reduce the chance of your cat getting infected.

## **What is the incubation time for cat flu?**

It usually takes 2-10 days for a cat to show symptoms of cat flu after being exposed to it.

## **How is cat flu treated?**

Treatment will vary based on the symptoms and severity of them.

In addition to treatment recommended by the vet, remove any discharge from the nose or eyes with a wet tissue and ensure the cat is still eating. If the cat is not eating their normal food, you can encourage the cat to eat by offering strongly flavoured food such as tuna or chicken whilst the cat is ill. It may also help to warm the food up before giving to the cat.

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