



# 1st Kitten Care Handout

**Vaccination:** Kittens receive a series of vaccinations usually starting around 8 weeks of age. The reason that a series is necessary is that kittens get antibodies from their mother that wear off over time. How quickly they wear off is different for every individual, but while they are present they neutralize the effect of the vaccine. So, we start vaccinating around 8 weeks of age which is about the earliest we would expect them to be wearing off and continue until we are sure that the kitten's immune system has responded to the vaccines, usually by 16-18 weeks of age. The shots are given 3-4 weeks apart; if given less than 3 weeks apart the kitten's immune system does not have time to respond to the vaccines as different shots.

At Animal Hospital of Salinas we recommend a series of FVRCP shots, two feline leukemia (FeLV) vaccinations during the kitten series, and a one year Rabies vaccination given when the kitten is at least 16 weeks of age. Other vaccines may be recommended based on your kitten's contact with other cats.

With any vaccination be observant for signs of an allergic reaction to the vaccines demonstrated by vomiting, facial swelling, hives, or extreme lethargy. If you see any of these signs bring your pet in for evaluation. If our hospital is closed please contact the emergency clinic. Please ask if you would like additional information on vaccines.

**Heartworm Control:** Heartworm disease is a 100% preventable condition. We recommend topical heartworm control, Revolution, in all cats beginning at 8 weeks of age. Revolution also prevents fleas and intestinal worms. Please ask if you would like additional information on heartworm disease.

**Flea Control:** Flea control is important year round in California. Aside from creating itchy bites, fleas also can transmit diseases and parasites (tapeworms) to your kitten. Revolution, which is also a heartworm preventative, provides 30 days worth of flea control. For kittens too young for topical flea control, the safest method to remove fleas is flea combing. Before applying any flea product, be sure that your kitten is older than the minimum age stated on the label of the product. Please ask if you would like additional information on flea control.

**Fecal Examination/ Deworming:** We recommend bringing a fecal sample to check for intestinal parasites on your first or second kitten visit. Many kittens are born with roundworms that they acquire from their mother while nursing. Roundworms are transmissible to humans. A fecal examination can also reveal infections with coccidia, giardia, and other less common intestinal

parasites and may require different dewormers. Please ask if you would like more information regarding a specific parasite

At Animal Hospital of Salinas we deworm kittens at 2, 4, 6, and 8 weeks of age, at which time they are started on Revolution which will also kill many intestinal worms. If your cat is kept on Revolution, monthly, year round we recommend annual deworming with a prescription dewormer. If your cat is not on a monthly heartworm preventative we recommend deworming with a prescription dewormer 4 times a year. Please ask if you would like additional information on fecal testing, intestinal worms, and/or deworming.

**Introducing your kitten to other pets:** If you haven't already begun introducing your kitten to your other pets, here are some helpful tips:

- 1) Give your kitten his/her own space. It can be helpful to confine your kitten to a single room without other pets, until you know that everyone will get along. You can try exposing your other pets to the room the kitten has been in, while the kitten is not there, to get them used to the kitten's smell. During this time, give your kitten the opportunity to explore your other pet's areas. Do not allow your new pet to be alone with your established pet(s) unsupervised until you are sure they get along.
- 2) If you have more than one established pet, introduce them one at a time. That way your kitten is not overwhelmed by the experience. Pay close attention to each pet's body language to assess how they are feeling about each other. Do not physically force them to be together, but allow them to check each other out at their own pace.
- 3) Spend quality time with your established pet(s). They are less likely to have negative associations if the new kitten is not taking away their time with you.

**Litterbox Education:** Most kittens come instinctively knowing how to use the litterbox, although many will develop preferences for a certain kind of litter. The general rule of thumb is to have one more litterbox than you have cats. So for a one cat household, plan on having 2 litterboxes. Make sure that the litterboxes are easily accessible. If you have a large house, it can be helpful to have a litterbox on each level and/or at each end of the house.

**Kitten-proofing:** Remember that kittens are naturally inquisitive and often quite athletic. Put away delicate items that could be broken. Tuck cords away so they do not get chewed. Tie up blind pulls so they do not get played with, and make sure any houseplants you have are nontoxic to cats.

**Feeding your new kitten:** If possible, for the first 3-4 days, feed your kitten what he/she had been fed previously; gradually increase the amount of your chosen kitten food and decrease the amount of the previous food. This minimizes stress and tummy-upset. Feed your cat a food that is AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials) labeled for growing kittens. You may feed wet, dry, or a mixture of both. Feed meals instead of leaving food out at all times. An 8 week old kitten should have food placed out for 20 minutes, four times a day. By 12 weeks you

should be able to reduce the number of meals to 2 per day. Use the label on the food as a guide for how much to feed, but base how much you feed on your kitten's body. His/her tummy should go straight across when looked at from the side. If it hangs down, cut back on the quantity you are feeding. It is very important to your kitten's health to prevent him/her from becoming overweight. At around 9 months of age you can transition your kitten to an adult diet.

**Socialization:** To prevent behavior problems, good socialization is key.

- 1) Invite friends over to hang out and encourage your kitten to have good experiences with people that are new to him/her.
- 2) Handle your kitten regularly. Be sure to touch his/her ears, paws, and mouth so he/she gets used to having these areas examined. This should be done in a friendly way. If your kitten is not enjoying the experience, take a break and try again later.
- 3) To teach a kitten not to bite. Exclaim, "OW!" or "No!" when bitten and then immediately ignore the kitten. He/she will learn that he/she will lose your attention if he/she bites and will learn not to do so.

**Claw Care and Scratching:** Scratching is a natural behavior for cats as a way of caring for their nails and to mark their environment as theirs. Provide appropriate scratching materials such as cardboard scratchers or sisal (rope) scratchers. Remember that if you teach your kitten it is OK to scratch carpet, like on a carpeted scratching post, they may scratch your carpet on the floor as well. Some cats prefer to scratch on a horizontal surface, and some cats prefer vertical scratching. Take note of what your kitten likes and try to provide something to scratch in the orientation he/she prefers.

It is important to start trimming your kitten's nails early so he/she gets used to having his/her paws handled. You can use human or cat nail clippers. Have your veterinarian show you how to trim the nails. It is usually easy to see the pink triangle of blood vessels in cat's nails to be able to avoid cutting it.