

## Congratulations on your new kitten!

We are so excited to watch your kitten grow, learn, and become a happy and healthy member of your family. At St. Francis Animal Hospital, our purpose is to provide compassionate and quality care for our patients, to build meaningful relationships with our clients, to share our knowledge and experience, and to exceed the expectations of those who demand the very best of veterinary care. We hope that the information provided in this guide gives you a good foundation for understanding your kitten's medical needs and helps you make decisions about their care throughout kittenhood and into the future.

If you need to contact us, you can reach us in several different ways:

Phone: 651-645-2808

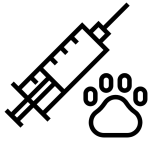
Email: [group@stfrancisabh.com](mailto:group@stfrancisabh.com)

Kittenhood is such a fun time! We cannot wait to get to know your new kitten, and we are here to help you along the journey.

Sincerely,

The Doctors and Staff of St. Francis Animal Hospital





# Vaccine Recommendations and Schedule

Vaccinating your kitten is one of the most important things you can do to keep your kitten healthy. At St. Francis Animal Hospital, we follow the recommendations of the American Association of Feline Practitioners. Your veterinarian will discuss your kitten's specific lifestyle when deciding which vaccines should be administered. The following are the most common vaccines we recommend for kittens:

## **Rabies**

Rabies is a viral disease carried primarily by bats and skunks. Rabies is always fatal for cats who are infected, and nearly always fatal for humans. The rabies vaccine is typically given at 16 weeks of age, then again one year later, and then annually for life. We utilize the Purevax non-adjuvanted rabies vaccine for cats, which carries a lower risk of severe vaccine reactions.

## **HCP (herpesvirus, calicivirus, and panleukopenia virus)**

This is a combination vaccine that protects against several of the most common and most contagious feline viral diseases. This vaccine series is given every 3 to 4 weeks throughout kittenhood, again one year later, and then every three years for life. Most kittens receive three or four HCP vaccines during their kitten series. HCP protects from:

**Herpes virus:** Feline herpesvirus 1 is a highly contagious viral infection that causes upper respiratory tract infections, and can lead to symptoms such as nasal discharge, sneezing, conjunctivitis, and eye ulcerations. Once infected, cats will carry the virus for life and may have waxing and waning respiratory signs.

**Calicivirus:** Feline calicivirus causes upper respiratory infections, oral ulcers, and can lead to chronic inflammation of the gums. Infected cats shed the virus in their saliva and nasal discharge, and cats become exposed through contact with infected cats or environments where infected cats have been housed.

**Panleukopenia (also known as feline distemper):** Feline panleukopenia is caused by feline parvovirus. This disease is highly contagious and often fatal. Panleukopenia causes lethargy, anorexia, vomiting, diarrhea, and for most cats, a profoundly low white blood cell count. Infected cats shed the virus in their stool.

## **Feline Leukemia Virus**

Feline leukemia virus (FeLV) is a contagious infection that can be spread from infected mothers to kittens or through bite wounds or other close contact with infected cats. Cats who develop disease from FeLV infection become sick due to immune system suppression. Kittens and cats under two years of age are most susceptible to FeLV infection. We strongly recommend this vaccine for any kittens who will be living with an FeLV-infected cat or who will have access to the outdoors, where they may come into contact with FeLV-infected cats.

## **Vaccination Schedule**

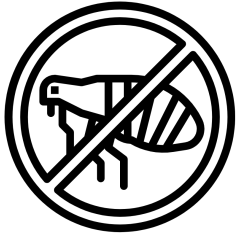
Kittens can have variable vaccine schedules and recommendations based on their age, previous vaccinations, and lifestyle. Your veterinarian will help determine your kitten's specific vaccine needs.

### **A typical kitten vaccination schedule is:**

8 weeks old: HCP

12 weeks old: HCP, Feline Leukemia Virus

16 weeks old: HCP, Feline Leukemia Virus, Rabies



# Parasite Prevention

In Minnesota, kittens and cats are exposed to a wide variety of parasites. Some of these parasites can be fatal, some can cause gastrointestinal upset or itchy skin, and some can make humans sick if we get exposed from our pets. Parasite preventative medications protect both your pets and you from these organisms.

## Heartworm Disease

Heartworms are blood-borne parasites that are spread by the bites of mosquitoes. Heartworms are transmitted when a mosquito bites an infected dog, ingests the tiny larvae from the infected animal's bloodstream, then bites another animal and deposits the larvae into this new host. Larvae eventually move to the large vessels of the heart and lungs, where they mature into adult heartworms. Cats who become infected may have symptoms that range from very minor (loss of appetite, weight loss) to very severe (respiratory distress, acute collapse). There is no treatment for heartworm disease in cats, and so preventative medications are essential to keep cats safe from this disease.

## Intestinal Parasites

Most kittens are born with one or more intestinal parasites, including roundworms and hookworms. Kittens are often treated for intestinal parasites multiple times throughout kittenhood. Cats can continue to be exposed to these parasites throughout their lives, especially if they are social with other cats or are active hunting cats. Many heartworm preventative medications are also preventatives against intestinal parasites. Because several of these parasites can be spread to humans, protecting your cats also protects you!

## **Fleas and Ticks**

Fleas are tiny external parasites that cause itchy bites and can spread diseases. Infected fleas can transmit tapeworms or infectious bacteria such as *Mycoplasma haemofelis*, which can make cats sick. Most cats get exposed to fleas from other infested pets or from exposure to wildlife such as rabbits or squirrels. Cats who are exposed to ticks outdoors can bring those ticks inside and expose the human members of the family to ticks. Flea and tick preventatives protect your cat both against the pesky parasites themselves as well as against the other diseases that can be caused by flea and tick bites.

## **Routine Screening For Parasites**

We recommend that all cats have a fecal sample tested for intestinal parasites twice in their first year of life, and then fecal testing once yearly in conjunction with their annual exams lifelong.



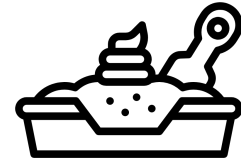
## **When should I use preventatives for my cat?**

Fleas, ticks, intestinal parasites, and mosquitoes that carry heartworm disease can all be active any time that outdoor temperatures are above freezing, and several species of these parasites can overwinter indoors. Cats who are active hunters can be exposed to parasites when they catch or ingest prey. We recommend using preventative medications once monthly year round in order to provide the best protection for your pet. Preventative medications should be started around 6 to 8 weeks of age.

## **Preventative Products**

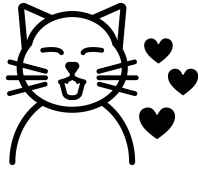
At St. Francis Animal Hospital, we recommend Revolution Plus, a once-monthly topical medication that prevents fleas, ticks, heartworm disease, roundworm infection, hookworm infection, and ear mites.

# Litter Box Training



For most kittens, learning to use a litterbox doesn't require much training. Kittens learn to use a litterbox through a combination of instinct and observing their mothers. However, it's important to set your kitten up for lifelong success by creating good litter box habits. Considerations to take when setting up and maintaining your kitten's litter box include:

- Make sure you have a litter box for each cat in the home plus one extra (i.e. three boxes for two cats). If your home has multiple floors, the boxes should be placed on different floors.
- Place the litter box in a private, low-traffic area that is also far away from noisy appliances such as washers, dryer, or furnaces.
- A litter box should be at least 1 ½ times the length of your cat's body. Many litter boxes sold in pet stores are too small, especially for larger kitties. Low-sided tupperware bins, cement mixing pans, or litter boxes designed for dogs are all better sizes for cats.
- Most cats prefer boxes that are open on top (not covered).
- Unscented clumping litter is the favorite for most cats. Cats like a deep litter bed (at least 2 inches, and ideally 3-4 inches of litter).
- Scoop the box once to twice daily. Once monthly, dump the entire litter box, wash with mild unscented soap, and refill with fresh litter.
- If your kitten has been using their box well and they suddenly start urinating or defecating outside the box, check in with your vet- there may be a medical reason underlying the breakdown in litter box habits.



# Introducing Kittens to Resident Cats

If you already have one or more cats at home, introducing a new kitten can be an anxiety-inducing experience for all involved. While there is no guarantee that a new kitten will be accepted by resident cats, you can follow these guidelines to help ensure the greatest chance of successful integration into the home.

First, be patient. Your kitten should be kept in a small room away from resident cats for at least the first several days that they are home. This will give them time to easily find their food, water, and litter box, start to learn how to explore their world, and gives your resident cats some time to start hearing and smelling the newcomer.

After your kitten has settled in, place your kitten in a carrier and allow the resident cats to see them. Keep these exposures short and separate the cats if there is hissing or signs of being fearful. Provide your cats' meals near the kitten's carrier or room so they learn to associate the kitten with something they love (snacks!). You may also want to add a Feliway diffuser in the room where you introduce the cats. Feliway is a pheromone that helps to encourage friendly cat interactions and reduces anxiety in cats.

Once the resident cats are comfortably approaching the carrier, you can start to let the kitten out for face-to-face interactions. Stay nearby initially so that you can separate your kitten if there are any signs of aggression. Usually, kittens are sociable and excited to meet new cats, but older cats may not be as enthusiastic. Make sure your older cats have ways to escape the kitten- vertical space such as cat trees are a great option. If at any point, there is aggressive behavior towards the kitten from an older cat, go back to whatever level of interaction the older cat was comfortable with and stick with that for several days before trying to allow closer interactions again.



## Feeding Your Kitten

Cat foods are available in a wide variety of forms, flavors, and formulas. It's no surprise that choosing a food can be a challenge! A good kitten food should be formulated specifically for growing kittens or all life stages. Kittens should be fed a kitten diet until about 12 months of age, then transitioned to an adult cat food. We suggest choosing a diet made by a company that employs a board-certified veterinary nutritionist to formulate their foods, such as Hills, Royal Canin, and Purina.

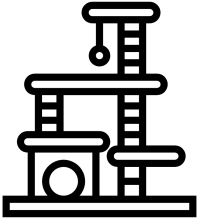
Cats develop food texture and flavor preferences early in life. We recommend offering a variety of flavors and forms of food, including both canned and dry foods, during kittenhood to expand your cat's palate. The more willing your kitten is to eat different types of food, the easier it is to change foods if needed later in life (i.e. if we need to start a prescription food to manage a health condition).

Feeding kittens meals (as opposed to offering free access to food all day) allows you to keep close control over the amount of food they are fed and to monitor their food intake to be sure they have a good appetite. Many people believe that having access to food all day allows cats to learn to self-regulate their food intake, but the vast majority of cats over consume calories if offered free access to food. Kittens should be fed two to three meals a day until they are six months old, at which point they can be transitioned to one to two meals per day. For most kittens, feeding guidelines on the package are a good starting point for deciding how much food to offer per day. Your veterinarian will monitor your kitten's growth and help adjust their food intake if needed.

Treats should constitute no more than 10% of their daily calorie intake.

Keeping your cat at a lean, healthy body condition can add years onto their life and may prevent a wide range of health issues.





# Kitten-Proofing Your Home

Kitten-proofing means making your living area safe for your kitten.

Common hazards to consider include:

1. Houseplants. Visit [aspc.org](http://aspc.org) for an extensive list of toxic plants.
2. Small spaces. Crawl spaces, dryers, under or inside reclining chairs, open vents, or tiny spaces behind furniture are all enticing to kittens, but kittens are little enough to get stuck and not be able to get themselves back out.
3. Wires. Chewing on wires can cause electrocution and painful burns in the mouth. Playing with wires may lead to your kitten pulling a heavy item like a laptop or an iron down onto themselves. Secure wires carefully and remove wires completely from areas where your kitten spends a lot of time.
4. Water. Aquariums, toilets, washing machines, or bathtubs are all drowning hazards for kittens.
5. Windows. Kittens and cats love to lay in open windows. Be sure that screens are strong and secured to prevent falls and escapes.
6. Unsafe household items. Kittens can turn nearly anything into a toy! Be sure to avoid access to dangerous items that kittens could ingest while they are playing. The most common household items that kittens may try to eat are:

- Rubber bands
- Hair binders and scrunchies
- Twist ties
- Ear plugs
- Pacifiers and baby bottle nipples
- String, yarn, and dental floss
- Ribbon



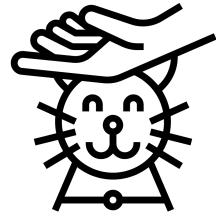
- Erasers
- Toys small enough to be swallowed

If your kitten has ingested any of these items and becomes lethargic, stops showing interest in food, or is vomiting, please call your vet or an emergency veterinarian immediately for guidance.

Kitten-proofing also means keeping your house and furniture safe from your kitten's natural tendencies to scratch and claw. Provide your kitten with their own furniture- scratching posts and cat trees are made to be enticing to kittens and allow kittens to perform their natural scratching behaviors in an appropriate place. Products such as Feliscratch can be placed on scratching posts to make them even more attractive to your kitten.

While declawing was a common way to prevent undesirable scratching behaviors for many years, we have come to recognize that this surgical procedure can lead to chronic pain, early onset arthritis, and can make cats more likely to resort to biting if they feel threatened or fearful which can be dangerous for their human families. We do not advocate for routine declawing in kittens. There are alternatives to declawing if you have found yourself with a kitten who is scratching your furniture despite providing lots of appropriate alternatives such as cat trees:

- Routine nail trimming helps to keep the sharp points of cat nails dulled so that claws are much less destructive. Most kittens learn to tolerate nail trimming quite easily. Visit Fear Free Happy Homes online for a great step-by-step guide to training your kitten to enjoy nail trims:  
<https://www.fearfreehappyhomes.com/8-steps-to-fear-free-nail-trims-for-you-and-your-cat/>
- Soft Paws Claw Caps are rubbery nail covers that can be glued onto your kitten's nails. These need to be replaced every month or two as your cat's nail caps naturally shed off.



## Spaying and Neutering

Spaying and neutering are surgical procedures that are performed to remove either the ovaries and uterus (for females) or the testicles (for males). These surgeries prevent your kitten from being able to reproduce. They also prevent undesirable hormonally-driven behaviors, such as spraying urine in the house, and greatly reduce the risk of some types of cancer. If your kitten came from a humane society or rescue organization, then they likely came to you already having been spayed or neutered. If your kitten is still intact, then we advise having this surgery done at or before 6 months of age.

The surgical procedure takes between 15 and 30 minutes. Kittens can have dinner the evening prior to surgery, but should not be allowed to eat any food the morning of their procedure. Water can be offered at all times. Pets are dropped off for surgery at 8 am, and most patients go home between 3 and 5 pm. Your kitten will be a little groggy and often clingy the day of their surgery. Pain medications ensure they are comfortable, but may make them sleepy. Most kittens feel like themselves within a day or two. Your kitten must have their activity restricted for about a week after surgery and will need to wear a cone to prevent them from licking at their incision site.

If you have any questions about spaying or neutering procedures, please ask your veterinary team!

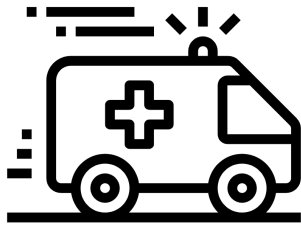


## Pet Insurance

Just like people, cats can sometimes get sick or injured unexpectedly, and medical bills can add up quickly. Pet insurance can help remove the financial stress when making decisions about your pet's medical care. Because most policies don't cover pre-existing conditions, kittenhood is the best time to enroll your pet in an insurance program. Some car insurance policies have inexpensive pet insurance policies that can be added, and some employers offer pet insurance as a benefit. Pet insurance can be a relatively inexpensive cost that helps provide peace of mind should your pet suddenly have a big medical need. We strongly recommend it!

A few questions to consider as you research options for pet insurance include:

- Does this plan cover injury, illness, routine wellness care, or all of the above?
- Does this plan have breed-specific exemptions that would affect coverage for your kitten?
- Are there specific types of diseases or therapies that are not covered by this plan (i.e. behavioral issues, integrative therapies)?
- Are dental procedures covered as routine wellness care or are they only covered if there is an injury such as a fractured tooth?
- Are there waiting periods prior to coverage taking effect?
- Does the plan require a new deductible be paid for each condition your pet is diagnosed with, or is the deductible an annual cost regardless of the number of conditions your pet has?



## Emergency Care for Your Kitten

Some types of medical emergencies are best handled by clinics that are specially designed and staffed to handle such cases. If your pet is experiencing any of the following, we advise that you take them straight to an emergency facility rather than bringing them to St. Francis:

- Difficulty breathing
- Seizures
- Severe trauma (i.e. hit by a car, dog attack)
- Excessive bleeding
- Inability to urinate
- Collapse, severe weakness, or unresponsiveness
- Pale gums
- Acute neurological disease (i.e. paralysis)
- Severe pain
- Severe vomiting
- Heatstroke

If you aren't sure whether your pet needs to be seen by an emergency facility, we may be able to triage your pet's condition over the phone and help you decide if they should go in for emergency care.

**The following clinics offer emergency and urgent care in the Twin Cities area. Be sure to call ahead if you can to let them know you are on your way and to confirm that they have the capacity to care for your pet.**

**Animal Emergency & Referral Center Oakdale**

1163 Helmo Ave N  
Oakdale MN 55128  
[www.aercmn.com](http://www.aercmn.com)  
(651) 501-3766  
Hours: Open 24/7

**Animal Emergency & Referral Center St Paul**

1542 West 7th St  
St Paul MN 55102  
[www.aercmn.com](http://www.aercmn.com)  
(651) 293-1800  
Hours: Open 24/7

**Blue Pearl Blaine**

11850 Aberdeen St NE  
Blaine MN 55449  
<https://bluepearlvet.com/hospital/blaine-mn/>  
(763) 754-5000  
Hours: Open 6 pm to 8 am Monday through Friday, 24 hours on weekends

**Blue Pearl Eden Prairie**

7717 Flying Cloud Drive  
Eden Prairie MN 55344  
<https://bluepearlvet.com/hospital/eden-prairie-mn/>  
(952) 942-8272  
Hours: Open 24/7

**Blue Pearl Arden Hills**

1285 Grey Fox Rd. Ste. 100

Arden Hills, MN 55112

<https://bluepearlvet.com/hospital/arden-hills-mn/>

(763) 754-5000

Hours: Open 24/7

**University of Minnesota Small Animal Hospital**

1365 Gortner Ave

St Paul MN 55108

<https://www.vmc.umn.edu>

(612) 626-8387

Hours: Open 24/7

**Como Park After Hours**

1014 Dale St N

St Paul MN 55117

<http://www.comoparkanimalhospital.com>

(651) 487-3255

Hours: Open 24/7

We work closely with each of these urgent care and emergency facilities. We trust their teams to provide the care your pet needs when we cannot. Afterwards, we will receive a comprehensive report for your pet's medical record at St Francis.



## Top 10 Toxins

Kitten-proofing your house means being aware of the most dangerous household toxins that could hurt your kitten if ingested. According to the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center, the following are the 10 most commonly reported toxins:

1. **Over-the-counter medications** such as ibuprofen, acetaminophen (Tylenol), joint rubs, and herbal supplements
2. **Human prescription medications**, especially cardiac, ADHD, thyroid, and antidepressant medications
3. **Toxic human foods**, especially xylitol, grapes, raisins, onions, garlic and protein bars
4. **Chocolate**, particularly baking cocoa and bittersweet chocolate
5. **Veterinary medications**, especially flavored chewable medications such as Rimadyl
6. **Household chemicals** such as paint, adhesives or spackle
7. **Rodenticides** such as D-con and Tom Cat mouse and rat poisons
8. **Plants**, especially lilies, sago palm, garlic plants, and milkweed
9. **Insecticides**
10. **Garden chemicals** like fertilizers and herbicides

If your pet has ingested something and you are concerned it might be toxic, you can call the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center for guidance and treatment recommendations 24 hours a day at (888) 426-4435 (note that a consultation fee may apply).