

## Fleas, Ticks, & Heartworms

# It's Kitten Season: Diseases Often Found in Young Cats



Kitten season is here! During late spring to summer, kitten birth rates are the highest of the year. Mother cats (called “Queens”) go into heat soon after the winter solstice as the weather warms and the days get longer. While kittens are cute and cuddly, they’re in danger of contracting numerous diseases.

Kittens are at a higher risk of getting certain parasites and diseases until their immune system develops and they begin to receive preventative medications and series of kitten shots (vaccines) from their veterinarian. Every kitten is different, so talk with your vet to determine which parasite preventatives and vaccinations will best help protect your kitten.

## Common parasites found in kittens

### Fleas

While annoyance and itch are the most common side effects from fleas, a heavy infestation can lead to potentially fatal anemia in kittens<sup>1</sup>. Getting rid of fleas can be frustrating, costly, and time-consuming, so prevention is key. Your veterinarian will determine a safe age for your kitten to begin taking flea medication.

To help prevent your kitten from getting fleas:

- Check them over daily with a flea comb
  - Ensure that all pets in your home are on flea preventatives (yes, even indoor-only pets)
  - Vacuum all flooring (including carpets and hardwood floors) and furniture
  - Wash bedding in hot water regularly (this may need to be done daily if there’s already an infestation, as immature fleas that live in the home environment can develop quickly)
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## Intestinal Worms

A kitten's immune system is not as strong as that of a full-grown cat, which means they're more likely to get intestinal worms. These worms can grow throughout the intestines and can cause symptoms ranging from stomach swelling to vomiting, diarrhea, dehydration, or a failure to thrive.

Roundworms are the most common type of intestinal worm of cats, as almost all cats get them at some point in their lives, usually as kittens. They can even get these worms from their mother during feeding<sup>2</sup>.

Hookworms are another type of intestinal worm that attach to the lining of a cat's intestinal wall, feed on a cat's blood, and pass eggs in a cat's feces<sup>2</sup>. They can cause anemia, diarrhea, and weight loss in kittens. Large numbers of these hookworms can be fatal<sup>3</sup>. Kittens should be dewormed according to a schedule set by your veterinarian, usually every two weeks beginning at 2 through 8 weeks of age when they are able to go on a preventative medication that protects against worms.

## Ear mites

These creepy-crawlies can infest your kitten's ears and cause them all sorts of suffering. Ear mites occur more often in cats less than one year of age. Signs of ear mites include shaking of the head, scratching at the ears, and inflammation of the ear canals<sup>4</sup>.

## Common diseases found in kittens

### Upper respiratory infections (URI)

Upper respiratory infections are similar to common colds in humans. They are serious in kittens because they aren't able to recover as quickly due to their weakened immune system and their developing bodies. Most cats are vaccinated against herpes virus and calicivirus, the viruses that tend to cause URI. Though the vaccine isn't necessarily 100% effective at preventing a cat from getting an infection with a herpes virus or calicivirus, it is highly effective at reducing risks and aiding in the recovery. If another cat in the home is showing signs of URI, isolate them from your kitten to keep the infection from spreading, as this virus is passed by direct contact with an infected cat.

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## Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV)

Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) causes cats to be vulnerable to many other infections. Usually transmitted through bites, on rare occasions FIV is transmitted from an infected mother cat to her kittens, usually during passage through the birth canal or when the newborn kittens ingest infected milk<sup>5</sup>. Ask your veterinarian to test your kitten for this disease during their kitten vaccine visits.

## Feline leukemia virus (FeLV)

Feline leukemia virus is one of the most common communicable diseases in cats — as many as 2–3% of cats in the United States have it<sup>6</sup>. Cats with suppressed immune systems (including kittens) are as much as 30% more likely to be infected if exposed<sup>6</sup>. Since it's transmitted from cat to cat, typically through bites and saliva, make sure that your kitten doesn't have access to other cats they don't know before they get vaccinated. Ask your veterinarian to test your kitten for this disease before receiving the vaccination.

Kittens need our help to start life off on the right paw. Your vet will recommend the best course of action to help protect them from these common kitten diseases.

## Learn more at [zoetispetcare.com](https://zoetispetcare.com)

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