**DISEASE INFORMATION FACT SHEET**

**Rabies**


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**Disease facts**

Rabies virus is shed in the saliva of rabid animals and is most commonly transmitted by bites. No feline variant of rabies virus exists; all cases of rabies in cats are a result of spillover from other reservoir species, including wildlife and dogs. The typical incubation period in cats is 2 months (range 2 weeks to longer than 1 year), followed by the development of clinical signs. The furious form of rabies is most common in cats, with death coming within 10 days of clinical signs. There are no ante-mortem diagnostic tests for rabies. Although cat-to-human transmission of rabies is rare, cat bite injuries are a common reason for post-exposure prophylaxis.¹ In regions where canine rabies has been controlled, such as the USA and Canada, cats may be the most commonly affected domestic species.²

**Vaccine types**

Two types of parenteral rabies vaccines are available for cats. Inactivated whole virus vaccines with adjuvant are available from multiple suppliers and provide durations of immunity of 1 or 3 years and are labeled for use as early as 12 weeks/3 months of age. A recombinant canarypox virus-vectored vaccine without additional adjuvant provides immunity for 1 year and is labeled for use as early as 12 weeks of age.

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The 2013 Report of the Feline Vaccination Advisory Panel of the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) provides practical recommendations to help clinicians select appropriate vaccination schedules for their feline patients based on risk assessment. The recommendations rely on published data as much as possible, as well as consensus of a multidisciplinary panel of experts in immunology, infectious disease, internal medicine and clinical practice. The Report is endorsed by the International Society of Feline Medicine (ISFM).

**Onset and duration of immunity**

In most locations where feline rabies vaccination is required, cats are generally considered to be immunized against rabies at 28 days following administration of a single, initial dose. A rabies antibody titer cannot be used as an index of immunity in cats or dogs. Currently, feline rabies vaccines are available with labels for 1 and 3 year durations of immunity. In locations that require vaccination of cats against rabies, revaccination with a single dose of rabies vaccine is typically required within 1 year following administration of the initial dose, regardless of the cat’s age at the time of initial vaccination and regardless of whether the vaccine

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used was licensed as a 1 year vaccine or a 3 year vaccine. A rapid anamnestic response is expected in cats receiving a booster inoculation. Following revaccination, cats are considered to be immediately immunized. Cats that are overdue for a booster vaccine (either a 1 year or 3 year vaccine) should be revaccinated with a single dose of vaccine as soon as possible. If a cat is revaccinated later than recommended, local statutes may dictate whether the cat is considered to be properly vaccinated and protected from infection or not.

**Vaccine safety**

The absence of live rabies virus in currently used vaccines precludes any concerns regarding reversion to virulence. Cats with a history of feline injection-site sarcoma believed to be associated with a rabies vaccine should not be revaccinated. Local rabies ordinance or statutes may apply.

**References**


**Other vaccine considerations**

Rabies vaccines have not been tested for efficacy in non-domestic species. In some jurisdictions, non-domestic felids and their hybrids may not be considered adequately vaccinated against rabies. Requirements for rabies vaccination, serological testing and quarantine for international travel vary widely depending on the origin and destination countries. Cat owners and their veterinarians should allow ample time to become familiar, and comply, with regulations for transporting cats.