

First Kitten Visit

Now that you have brought home your new addition, the staff members at La Costa Animal Hospital are here to help you navigate the waters of feline health care.

Fecal examination and deworming: many kittens acquire roundworms (*Toxocara cati*) from their mother; kittens with roundworms may have soft stool or visible adult worms in their stool, but many have no symptoms at all. As roundworms can be spread to people and have very serious consequences in children including blindness, a fecal examination to detect roundworms will be recommended at your kitten's first visit. If roundworms are found, your kitten will receive a pill on the day of his or her first visit, and again 2-3 weeks later.

Routine preventative care:

Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukemia virus (FeLV) testing: FIV and FeLV are retroviruses that kittens may acquire from their mother or other adult cats to which they have been exposed. It is recommended that all kittens are tested on their first visit. If positive, they should be isolated and re-tested at 6 months old. Drs. Schatzle and Meisner are happy to discuss these diseases and their implications further with you.

Vaccines: 'core' vaccines are those that are recommended to all kittens seen at La Costa Animal Hospital; these include the rabies vaccine and the 'feline distemper' vaccine. The **rabies** vaccine is given once at 12 weeks old, then yearly thereafter. The '**feline distemper (FVRCP)**' vaccine protects against feline viral rhinotracheitis (feline herpesvirus 1), calicivirus and panleukopenia. It is given every three to four weeks starting at 8 weeks old, until kittens are over 16 weeks of age. This vaccine is then repeated every year.

Feline leukemia virus is considered to be a non-core vaccination, in that it is only given to outdoor cats. This vaccine is given twice, three to four weeks apart, starting at eight weeks old.

Flea preventatives: flea infestations are unfortunately very common in southern California. As it is far easier to prevent fleas than to treat an infestation, it is recommended that all patients at La Costa Animal Hospital are given flea preventatives year-round. There are many products available to prevent fleas, including collars, sprays, shampoos, spot-ons and oral medications; Drs. Schatzle and Meisner will be happy to discuss these options with you. At La Costa Animal Hospital, the recommended product for cats is Comfortis®. This is a tablet given orally every month.

Spaying/neutering:

Spaying: spaying is the surgical removal of a female cat's uterus and ovaries (ovariohysterectomy). This not only prevents pregnancy, but if performed before the first heat much reduces the risk of breast cancer. It also prevents pyometra, an infection of the uterus that requires emergency surgery. Spaying is recommended at five to six months old.

Neutering: neutering is the removal of a male cat's testicles. It prevents a male cat from impregnating females, and also dramatically reduces a male cat's testosterone level. Testosterone drives many undesirable male behaviors, including wandering, aggression and urine marking. Neutering is recommended at five to six months old.

Behavior: Drs. Schatzle and Meisner will be happy to discuss basic kitten training with you at your kitten visit, and provide relevant literature.

Congenital conditions: during your kitten's first physical examination, Drs. Schatzle and Meisner will look for congenital conditions (diseases your kitten may be born with) that require early intervention, to ensure your kitten gets the best possible care from day one.

What to expect in coming years:

Annually: fecal examination, feline rabies vaccine, feline distemper vaccine +/- feline leukemia vaccine

Every 6 months to 2 years: most pets will need a 'dental' routinely. A dental at minimum involves blood work, general anesthesia and teeth cleaning (scale/polish). If particular teeth appear diseased, dental x-rays will be recommended and possibly extractions (tooth pulling). Routine dentals will reduce the likelihood that your pet will need extensive x-rays or extractions at the time of each dental. For information on a common feline dental condition known as 'feline odontoclastic resorptive lesions' or FORLs, please visit the Pet Health Library.