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Animal Health Centre



The Clutha Vets Kitten Handbook

Welcome to your new kitten

Here at Clutha Vets we want to work together with you to keep your new kitten healthy and happy for many years to come. We have a team of dedicated companion animal vets and nurses who can advise you on all aspects of your kittens well being.

Our aim is to give your kitten the best possible start and to help prevent health problems in the future. When you visit the clinic, our vets and nurses can give your kitten a tailor made healthcare programme to suit his or her lifestyle. This booklet contains some basic information on the main aspects of kitten care including:

- Vaccination
- Worming
- Feeding
- Skin parasites
- Microchipping
- Neutering
- Dental care
- Pet insurance

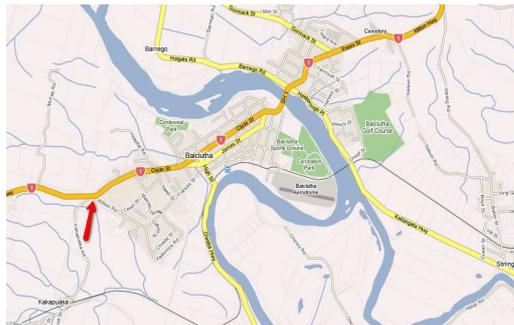




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Our Clinics

Balclutha



Tel: 03 418 1280
Fax: 03 418 1750
Address: 3 Wilson Road, Balclutha
Email: admin@cluthavets.co.nz
Opening hours: Monday – Friday 8am to 5.30pm

Milton



Tel: 03 417 8032
Fax: 03 417 8031
Address: 106 Union Street, Milton
Email: Milton@cluthavets.co.nz
Opening hours: Monday – Friday 8am to 5.00pm

24 Hour Emergency Telephone: 03 418 1280

Vaccination

The diseases we protect cats against are:

- **Snuffles** – a rarely fatal disease sometimes called “Cat Flu”. It is very infectious and is caused by a combination of one or more viruses often with secondary bacterial infection. Calicivirus and rhinotracheitis virus are the most common viruses involved and are what we vaccinate against. They only affect cats. They are spread in droplets of moisture in the air by sneezing, direct contact or via contaminated feeding bowls. Cat flu is rarely fatal except in very young or very old animals or those with a compromised immune system. However it can range in severity from a slight snuffle to a severe respiratory infection requiring intensive nursing including feeding tube placement. It can also cause severe eye infections resulting in loss of the eye, and painful ulceration of the mouth. A complication can be recurrent or persistent infection throughout life with repeated snuffles and eye infections requiring lifelong medication.
- **Panleucopaenia Virus** – an often fatal disease which is sometimes called “Cat Flu”. It is a similar disease to parvovirus in dogs but only affects cats. It is spread by infected faeces and can remain in the environment for a long time. It causes severe vomiting and diarrhoea which is often fatal. If the virus is caught during pregnancy it can cause deformities and brain damage in the kittens.
- **FIV** – Feline Immunodeficiency Virus. This belongs to the group known as lente (slow) viruses because it takes a long time (sometimes years) from infection for illness to become apparent. It only affects cats and can not be passed on to humans or other animals. It is spread in saliva by biting or can be passed on from a mother cat to her kittens after birth. Once they have the virus cats remain infected for life. FIV causes gum inflammation, fevers, chronic diseases, recurrent infections and tumours. It is most common in un-neutered male cats as they fight more frequently. The rate of infection in the feral cat population in New Zealand is estimated at 14%. The need to vaccinate depends on where you live and what your kitten’s lifestyle will be like. If it is likely that a kitten or older cat has been exposed to the virus they can be tested before vaccination with a simple quick blood test that is carried out in the clinic.





Age of Vaccination

Kittens are usually vaccinated from 9 weeks of age. Vaccines can be started from 6 weeks of age against cat flu. Please speak to us if your kitten is less than 9 weeks old but you are worried about the risk of cat flu. A combined vaccine protects against panleucopaenia virus, calicivirus and rhinotracheitis virus. Two injections are needed 3-4 weeks apart then an annual booster vaccination. Like human flu the immunity to cat flu is not long lived and without regular boosters your cat will be at risk. The FIV vaccination requires an initial course of 3 injections given 2-4 weeks apart and can be started from 9 weeks of age. An annual booster is also required. Most catteries require you to show proof that your cat is up to date with their cat flu vaccination.

Worming

The type of wormer and frequency with which you need to give it depends on your cat's lifestyle. An indoor cat is much less likely to have a worm burden than a cat that is a very active hunter. Most kittens should be wormed from 2 weeks of age then every 2 weeks until 12 weeks old. In most cases 3 monthly worming against roundworms and tapeworms is then adequate. Wormers come in the form of tablets or as a liquid that you spot onto the skin. We would be happy to advise you on how often to worm your cat or to help if you have trouble giving them tablets.

Feeding

Kittens should be fed on a specially formulated kitten food up to 12 months of age. Dry complete diets are the most cost effective and convenient to feed. Most kittens and cats prefer to have several small meals throughout the day. If you weigh out each day's allowance into a container you can then trickle feed it over the course of the day. The volume you need to feed is usually quite small so by weighing it out you can make sure you are not over feeding. There is no link now to dry diets and bladder problems in cats. However if your cat has had urinary tract problems we may advise a special prescription diet or wet food diet instead of biscuits in certain cases. Dry diets are also better for your cat's teeth.



Skin Parasite Control

The most common products used are for the treatment and prevention of fleas. Most other skin parasites are only treated when there is a clinical problem, for example ear mites and lice. Your kitten will be checked over for signs of skin parasites when they come for their health check and vaccination. We can discuss the type and frequency of treatments needed depending on your kitten's lifestyle. We usually advise spot-on treatments as they are more effective than flea collars, powders or shampoos. They are also much easier to apply! Some spot-on treatments only treat fleas and lice. Others also treat roundworms. It is important to check what each product does and the correct dose so please ask for advice.

Grooming

If your kitten is long haired it is very important to get it used to being brushed. Long hair can become very matted and knotted, causing discomfort. It is not possible to brush these mats and using scissors to cut knots out often risks cutting the skin. Once they have become matted the cats need to have an anaesthetic and have the hair shaved off.

Prevent knots on your kitten by regular grooming. Start for a minute or two once a day using a suitable soft brush. It is important not to hurt or frighten your kitten and to get them used to being handled all over including their tummy. Short haired cats also benefit from being groomed and it is a good time to check your cat for wounds, lumps or other skin problems.

Microchipping

Yes, kittens and cats can be microchipped as well as dogs! Although not required by law, microchipping is a good way of permanently identifying your kitten and of helping get them back to you if they get lost, stray or are injured on the road. The New Zealand Companion Animal Register is a nationwide register for both dogs and cats.

You will probably be surprised at how little it costs to have your kitten microchipped and registered. It is a simple quick procedure similar to an injection and does not require anaesthesia. You may prefer not to let your kitten outside until after it has been neutered and so it may be the ideal time to have them microchipped as well.



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Neutering

Unless you have a pedigree kitten it is likely that you will plan to have your kitten neutered. Entire male tomcats are likely to spray urine in the house, smell strongly, stray away from home and fight frequently. Entire queens will produce an astounding number of kittens in a very short period of time adding to an already large cat population. A queen can become pregnant again within 6 weeks of giving birth. We neuter most cats at 5-6 months of age. However earlier neutering is possible so please come and discuss this with us. As you know, through the generosity of everyone in the area and Sharron West's hard work, Clutha Vets has successfully rehomed a huge number of unwanted cats and kittens. We would love to see the day when we no longer have to do this. Neutering plays a vital role in achieving this.

Dental Care

Most kittens and cats will not be very enthusiastic about having their teeth brushed! However without dental care most cats will develop some degree of dental disease in their lifetime. Dry biscuit type diets are better for keeping teeth clean than soft wet tinned or sachet type diets. There are specific dry diets which are better than normal dry food at keeping cats' teeth clean. These may be fed as the normal diet or fed if there are signs of early dental disease or after dental work has been carried out. There are special toothpastes suitable for cats which have a pleasant taste and which do away with the need for vigorous tooth brushing. These can be smeared over the teeth and gums with a special small toothbrush or even wiped on the back of a paw for the cat to lick off. Cats suffer from a type of tooth decay which does not affect dogs. It causes small holes to appear in the enamel of the tooth near the gum margin and is very painful. Eventually the crown of the tooth can break off causing chronic pain.

Cats may drool, have smelly breath, be picky with their food, groom less or lose weight. However there may be few outward signs and it is not until the damaged teeth have been removed that you notice how much happier your cat is. If you have concerns about your kitten or cats teeth please let us know.





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Common Hazards

Cats are not as prone to eating poisonous things as dogs are. However cats do seem to have a liking for houseplants some of which are poisonous including Lilies and Cycad palms. Other plants that are toxic include daffodils and lily of the valley. Cats are also susceptible to being poisoned by anti-freeze from car engines. They drink it from spills on the ground and it can be rapidly fatal causing kidney failure. Slug bait and rat bait are other common poisons that cats can be exposed to. Never give your cat any human drugs without checking with a vet first. Cats are unable to breakdown aspirin or paracetamol and any dose can be fatal.

Cats can also find other things in the home which can cause serious problems. Eating wool, string, thread (with or without needles attached) elastic bands or tinsel can cause serious problems as it gets wrapped round and tangled in the digestive tract. Have a good look around your home for any small spaces or holes where your kitten could fall or become trapped. Remember to keep the toilet lid closed to prevent any curious kittens going for an unwanted swim!

Insurance

Veterinary medicine is advancing rapidly and many more diseases and conditions are now treatable. Sometimes these treatments come at a significant cost, particularly if referral to a specialist is recommended. Pet insurance is becoming increasingly available to help meet these unexpected costs. As with any insurance there are many different policies to choose from. It is important to read the conditions of each policy carefully to check if a certain condition is only covered for a certain period or up to a certain amount of money. Usually any pre-existing conditions will be excluded. We all hope our pet will be healthy and accident free but if the worst does happen then having a good pet insurance policy will enable you to choose the best treatment available.





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Feline Behaviour

Cats are fascinating animals and often don't see the world quite as we do. This can cause problems at times if they toilet in inappropriate places, shred carpets or furniture or steal underwear from the neighbours! Some cats prefer to toilet anywhere other than in their litter tray. Others cannot tolerate any changes whether that is new furniture, new carpets or workmen in the house. Many cats prefer to be solitary and resent other cats in the family or cannot tolerate other cats visiting their house or garden. Territories can overlap and lead to serious fighting resulting in nasty infections and abscesses. If you are having issues with your kitten or cat please come in for a chat as often there are things that can be done to help.

Remember if you live near a busy road or in an area with a lot of other cats there is no reason your kitten cannot be a solely indoor cat. Some cats have very little desire to venture outside and if you provide them with a variety of toys for exercise and an indoor garden (pots of grass and catmint) they can lead a happy and fulfilled life in safety.

A Little Reminder

Please remember that if you are pregnant it is important not to handle cat litter trays or to use gloves if you have to do so. This is because of the risk of the transmission of Toxoplasmosis. You should not handle or medicate a sick cat either for the same reason. Also if you are a gardener wear gloves when working with soil. If you have any concerns please discuss them with your GP.





Website

Have a look at our website www.cluthavets.co.nz , we have a section on Animal Health which is regularly updated with articles from our Companion Animal Vets.

The screenshot shows the website's navigation menu with links for Home, Team, Newsletters, News & Events, and Photo Gallery. Below the menu are four small images of animals: a deer, a pig, a horse, and a goat. The main content area is titled 'Animal Health' and contains a table of articles.

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Compiled by Dr Catherine Copland BVMS

