

## UPPER RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS IN CATS

Upper respiratory infections are common in cats and are caused by a variety of organisms. These organisms include rhinotracheitis virus, calici virus, *Chlamydia psittaci*, reoviruses, and various other bacteria. In most cases, isolation of the offending organism is neither necessary nor cost effective since the treatment for most of these organisms are the same. Respiratory diseases are transmitted by direct contact with infected cats or discharges from their eyes, nose, mouth, or other body fluids. Some of these organisms can be spread by contaminated clothing, hands, feeding utensils, and other articles. In a few cases, the organisms are air-borne for short distances. Some of the more common upper respiratory infections can be prevented by vaccination with the FVRCP vaccine.

The most common signs of respiratory disease are sneezing, cough, discharge from the eyes, nose or mouth, difficulty breathing, gagging, lack of appetite and weight loss. Some infections last only a few days, while others may be present for weeks. Some of these disease agents can exist in a carrier state in apparently healthy cats. Persistently infected cats may suffer from periodic relapses when stressed.

While most upper respiratory infections can be treated at home, severely ill cats may require hospitalization. Treatment usually consists of good nursing care plus antibiotics and/or antihistamines. Keep your cat indoors until he is completely recovered. Remove all secretions from the eyes, nose and mouth several times each day with a warm moistened washcloth. Encourage your cat to drink water. If your cat is reluctant to eat, try offering warmed canned food, meat baby food, or tuna. If your cat is very congested, use a humidifier or take your cat into a steamy bathroom several times a day. Give all medication as directed. Call the clinic if you cannot give the medication or if your cat's symptoms worsen.