



American Animal Hospital

Caring for your pets as if they were our own.

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Preventative Health Care for your Cat

The Physical Exam

An annual physical exam is even more important than vaccines in maintaining the health of your pet. At the start of the exam, we will ask a number of questions about your pet's medical history, diet, medications and supplements, etc. This is your opportunity to voice any concerns you have about how your pet has been doing. Then we perform a systematic examination of your entire pet to be certain that there are no subtle changes that can indicate early disease processes. All of this information is combined to arrive at a complete assessment of your furry friend's health status. Finally, a plan of action is formulated – with your input – to correct any problems and help you maintain the comfort and health of you pet. Remember, you are part of your pet's health care team and your input is important!

FeLV/FIV/Heartworm Testing

We strongly recommend testing your kitten/cat for FeLV/FIV. As the names imply, both Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) are viral diseases which attack the immune system, very similar to the way HIV/AIDS attacks the body in humans. FIV is most commonly transmitted by bites during fighting, but just like in people it can also be transmitted by sexual contact or improperly screened blood transfusions. FeLV is more easily spread – by licking (saliva contact), blood contact, or from mother to fetus. Once contracted, it is virtually impossible to clear or cure these infections; treatment is targeted towards management changes, such as preventing your cat from catching any other diseases and preventing transmission to other cats. Testing is via a small blood sample, and includes a test for heartworm disease as well. Heartworm is spread via mosquitos and, although not as commonly found in cats, even a single worm can cause serious disease.

Although we feel testing is important, American Animal Hospital does NOT recommend routine vaccination for FeLV, FIV or FIP (Feline Infectious Peritonitis), as these controversial vaccines have side effects which typically outweigh the risk of contracting the disease.

Fecal Exam for Intestinal Parasites

A small sample of your pet's stool should be examined at least yearly to detect the presence of intestinal parasites. Cats with more exposure to parasites (mousers, outdoor cats, etc) should have a fecal exam every 6 months. Although intestinal worms are large enough to see with the naked eye, they are typically not shed in the feces. Their eggs and the many single-celled parasites are too small to be seen without a microscope, so owners often have no idea their pet is infected. When you drop off a fecal sample, it is dissolved in water, centrifuged, and mixed with a special solution which helps to separate out parasites and parasite eggs. It is then examined under a microscope to identify any parasites present so that appropriate treatments can be administered. For outdoor cats and hunters, we also recommend strategically deworming every 3-4 months for the main parasites to reduce risk to their human housemates. Some of these parasites, like roundworms and hookworms, are a zoonotic risk (transmissible to humans) and can cause serious health issues, especially in young children, so be sure to clean litter boxes thoroughly.

Distemper Group Vaccine

The distemper group vaccine protects against a core group of infectious – and sometimes fatal – diseases. The name comes from one component, feline distemper or Panleukopenia, which causes severe upper respiratory and neurological disease. Additional components are Calicivirus and Viral Rhinotracheitis, which are both highly contagious upper respiratory diseases. This vaccine is safe and effective when professionally administered, and should not cause significant discomfort to your pet. In most cats we can actually give this vaccine as completely painless nose drops. The distemper combo is boosted at one year of age, and every three years thereafter to maintain adequate protection. Owners that are concerned about over-vaccination are welcome to discuss performing vaccine titers, which measure the level of protective antibody for each of these serious diseases.

Rabies Vaccine

Most people are aware of this highly fatal viral disease, which destroys the nervous system. It can affect all warm-blooded species and is transmissible from pets to people through bites or saliva-contamination of other wounds. Rabies vaccine is required by municipal law in the Fox Valley for all cats, and must be given by a licensed veterinarian. At American Animal Hospital, we use a new vaccine that is less likely to cause the vaccine-associated tumors sometimes seen in cats; this vaccine needs to be boosted annually.

Flea & Tick Preventative – Optional

Recent technology offers us several safe and effective options to protect your pet from flea and tick infestations. The best option for your pet depends on your lifestyle, but for most cats we recommend monthly use of Frontline® or Revolution® throughout the season. Since most cats aren't outside during the winter months, preventatives are generally only necessary from about March through November.

Wellness Testing – Optional

Wellness testing, which typically includes blood and urine analysis, is a valuable addition to the physical exam. In young, healthy pets wellness testing gives us important baseline information. Since many tests have a range of what is considered “normal,” having baseline values means that we can pick up on small changes in organ function sooner and begin treatment before the problem snowballs into something more serious. Cats are especially good at masking symptoms of disease – by the time they stop eating and look sick, they are often very, very ill. Wellness testing helps us find the problems before they progress far enough to make your pet miserable.

Our Health Care Team

Our team is here to give you as much information as you need to make the best decisions for you and your pet. We continually attend educational seminars and conferences to make sure that we have the latest information to be able to answer your questions and best meet the needs of your furry family. Use us as your first resource – we want to help keep your pet healthy and happy!

