



Bishop Ranch Veterinary Center & Urgent Care Feline Immunization Safety

For years routine immunization of cats, dogs, and people has been the basis of preventive health care. We have compiled this informational handout to help clarify recent research into the safety and potential side effects of the various feline immunizations, and to make you aware of the steps we have taken to insure the health of your cat.

The diseases for which your cat is at risk.

Cats that venture outdoors are at risk for contracting any infectious feline disease. This includes two feline upper respiratory infections (Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis and Calicivirus), Panleukopenia (otherwise known as “Distemper”), Feline Leukemia, and Rabies. Effective immunizations exist for all of these diseases. With the exception of Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis these diseases are potentially fatal infections.

Rabies is a zoonotic disease, meaning it can be transmitted from other animals to humans. While the Feline Leukemia Virus is not zoonotic, it is fatal during the first 3 years for over 50% of the cats that contract it. Cats that live strictly indoors by themselves or who live with other cats that are strictly indoors, are not at risk for contracting Feline Leukemia or Rabies. These two infections are spread only by being bitten by other animals.

Recent evidence about vaccine-associated sarcomas.

Sarcomas are a class of tumor that develops underneath the skin or inside the body. Various studies have implicated the immunizations against the Feline Leukemia Virus and Rabies as causing sarcomas at the site of immunization in a small percentage of cats. The estimates range from as low as 1 in 25,000 cats up to 1 in 1,000 cats.

These tumors first appear as a small bump under the skin where the immunization was given, and can occur any time from a few weeks to over two years after immunization. If detected early they can be removed. If they are advanced before surgery is attempted, there is a high likelihood of regrowth after surgical removal.

Our plan to protect your cat's safety.

1. For indoor cats, we no longer recommend immunization against the Feline Leukemia Virus or Rabies.
2. For cats that go outdoors, there is now the option to immunize with a non-adjuvanted Rabies vaccine formulated to reduce the risk of developing vaccine-associated sarcomas. An adjuvant is an additive that increases the body's immune response to an immunization. Adjuvanted vaccines induce immunity that lasts longer, but can be irritating to the tissues under the skin. This irritation is implicated in the development of vaccine-associated sarcomas.
3. Immunizations are now given in different locations to further reduce the amount of subcutaneous irritation at any one location as a result of immunization.

As always, our concern is the overall health and well being of your cat. Please feel free to discuss this information with any of our doctors if you have further questions.