

Feline Upper Respiratory Infection

What is Feline Upper Respiratory Infection? Feline Upper Respiratory Infection (URI) is common in cats--it's basically a "cat cold." Almost all cases of feline URI are caused by one of two viruses: feline herpesvirus (also known as feline rhinotracheitis virus) or feline calicivirus. These two viruses tend to be "species specific" meaning that they can only infect cats and kittens and cannot be contracted by most other animals or humans. As with human colds, though, cat colds are highly contagious among members of the species. They are rarely life-threatening.



What are the signs? Symptoms of feline URI are similar to those humans experience when they have a cold or flu. They may include sneezing, fever, runny nose or eyes, nasal congestion, ulcers on or in the tongue or mouth region, lethargy, and lack of appetite or thirst. Kittens may also develop what is known as "limping kitten syndrome," which causes fever and painful swelling of the joints. Symptoms of a feline URI are generally mild at first and worsen over the course of 1 to 3 days. The illness itself typically lasts anywhere from 1 to 4 weeks, depending on the strength of the cat's immune system.

How is it treated? URIs are easily manageable in a home setting. Treatment aims to strengthen the infected cat's body and immune system. Good nutrition and extra care and attention go a long way in helping an infected cat recover from a URI. Some cats may be prescribed an antibiotic to prevent or treat any secondary bacterial infections that may accompany the viral infection. Infected cats may also stop eating or drinking which can quickly lead to dehydration and possible liver disease. These cats may require special therapy to combat anorexia and/or dehydration. Though uncommon, some cats may become sick enough to require hospitalization and the most severe cases can lead to fatal pneumonia if the proper care is not provided. Luckily, almost all cats and kittens make a full recovery with the proper care.

****Many cats develop URI symptoms shortly after adoption. This is normal due to being exposed to other cats while in the shelter and due to the stress of transitioning into a new home. Don't panic! Most cats will get over their cold with time, but please see your veterinarian if symptoms are severe.***