



## Upper Respiratory Infections in Cats

### What is Upper Respiratory Infection (or URI)

Our feline friends can get colds, too! Upper Respiratory Infection (or URI) is an infection in the upper respiratory tract of your cat and involves areas such as the nose, throat and the sinus area and is susceptible to infections caused by a variety of viruses and bacteria. URI is more common in cats that live outdoors, in shelters, in catteries or in multiple pet households.

### What Causes Upper Respiratory Infections in Cats?

While there is a higher prevalence of this infection in kittens, this condition is present in all ages and breeds. Cats that are kept in crowded quarters with other animals, as in a kennel, are at an increased risk of infection. Added to the risk is the ease with which this bacteria travels.

Transmission can take place even without direct contact with an infected animal, as the molecules from a cough or sneeze can travel across a room, a human caretaker can carry the bacteria and spread it by touch, or the cat may come into contact with a contaminated object, such as in a bedding or feeding area.

Once infected, cats can become carriers for life and can become sick again in times of high stress and though they may not show clinical signs, they can still transmit the viruses to others. Cats often develop bacterial infections secondary to these common viral infections. URI is not contagious to humans.

### What Are the General Symptoms of Upper Respiratory Infections?

Symptoms differ depending on the cause and location of the infection, but some common clinical signs of upper respiratory problems in cats include:

- Sneezing
- Congestion
- Runny nose
- Cough
- Clear to colored nasal discharge
- Gagging, drooling
- **Fever**
- Loss of or decreased appetite
- Nasal and oral ulcers
- Squinting or rubbing eyes
- Depression

## **Are Certain Cats Prone to Upper Respiratory Infections?**

Age, vaccination status and physical condition all play a role in a cat's susceptibility to upper respiratory infections, but cats who live in multi-cat households or shelters are most susceptible. Veterinarians have found that stress plays a role in causing outbreaks of URI, and cats in any shelter, cattery or boarding facility are generally experiencing high levels of stress. Cats who have recovered from URI can become carriers, and may experience recurrences when stressed. Certain breeds like Persians and other flat-faced breeds have a predisposition to develop upper respiratory infections due to their facial structure.

## **What Should You Do If You Think Your Cat Has an Upper Respiratory Infection?**

It's important to bring your cat to a veterinarian if you think she may be suffering from an upper respiratory infection. A brief exam by a veterinarian will help to determine if your cat requires medication, has a fever or is dehydrated. Avoid self-diagnosis, since your cat may be infectious and require isolation, antibiotics or additional veterinary care.

## **Treatment Options**

Cats with upper respiratory tract infections should be isolated from other cats for at least three to four weeks, to prevent contagion. All bowls, bedding, crates, toys and other things that an infected cat has come into contact with should be thoroughly and regularly washed with a 1:32 dilute solution of bleach-to-water. People who touch an infected cat should be especially attentive to good hygiene, including washing their hands with soap and warm water and changing and laundering their clothes and shoes on a regular basis.

Most affected cats can be treated at home. This is preferable to in-hospital care, at least from the cat's perspective. At-home supportive care for cats with upper respiratory infections is very similar to how we care for people with "the flu." The cat should be in a calm, warm and quiet environment that promotes rest and relaxation. A home vaporizer will improve humidification and help to keep the cat's nasal passages moist. Some authorities recommend a cool steam vaporizer rather than a warm vaporizer. Placing the cat on a dry surface in a steamy bathroom for 10 to 15 minutes several times daily is also helpful. Many owners bring their cat into the bathroom with them while they shower or bathe.

## **Prevention of URI**

It's difficult to prevent feline upper respiratory tract infections especially in catteries or shelters. Managers of shelters and pet owners can reduce the frequency and severity of the infection by ensuring that the shelter or home is properly ventilated and cleaned. There should be a reduction of overcrowding and stress.

A nutritious diet can strengthen your pet's immune system and can reduce the severity of the infection. Sick cats should be isolated and all cats should be regularly vaccinated and dewormed.

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