



# CARING FOR CATS: A Shelter Vet's Guide to Common Infectious Diseases in Cats

## ABOUT ME:

- Medical Director, One Tail at a Time
  - Based in Chicago, IL
  - Foster Based Rescue
- Tuskegee University CVM c/o 2017
- Specialty Shelter Medicine Internship: University of Illinois CVM 2017-2018
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**ONE TAIL  
AT A TIME** 

# WHY IT MATTERS

Foster caregivers play a vital role in identifying, managing, and preventing the spread of infectious diseases in cats. Early detection and proper care significantly improve outcomes and prevent zoonotic risks.

## WHAT YOU'LL LEARN:

- 🐾 How to recognize common infectious diseases in cats.
- 🐾 How these diseases spread (including risks to humans).
- 🐾 How to care for infected cats and protect yourself.
- 🐾 Key prevention strategies and helpful resources.



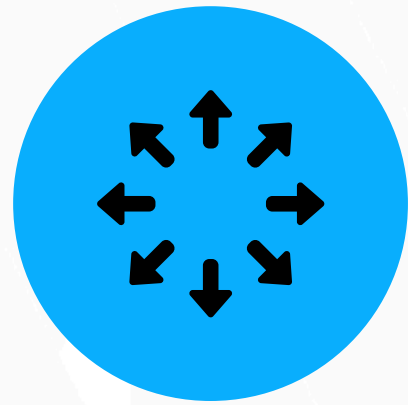
A blue-tinted photograph of a fluffy kitten looking over a ledge. The kitten is the central focus, with its face and front paws visible. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a window or a doorway. The overall mood is calm and focused.

# Common Diseases

- 1 RINGWORM (DERMATOPHYTOSIS)**

# RINGWORM:

A fungal skin infection causing circular skin lesions.



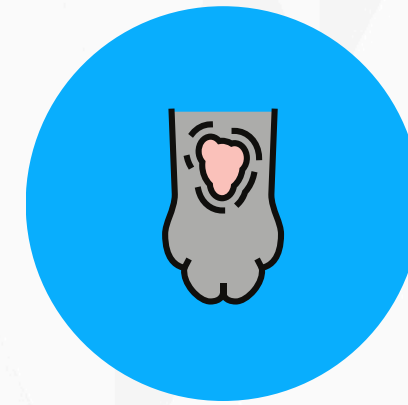
## How it spreads:

Direct contact with infected cats, contaminated bedding, brushes, or the environment.



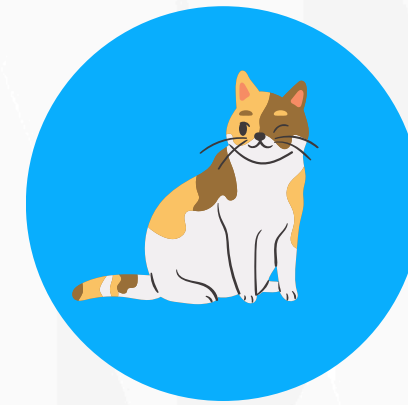
## Zoonotic Risk:

Yes. Humans can contract ringworm, especially those with weakened immune systems.



## Signs in Cats:

Circular hair loss, scaly skin, itching, brittle fur.



## Severity/Risk to Life:

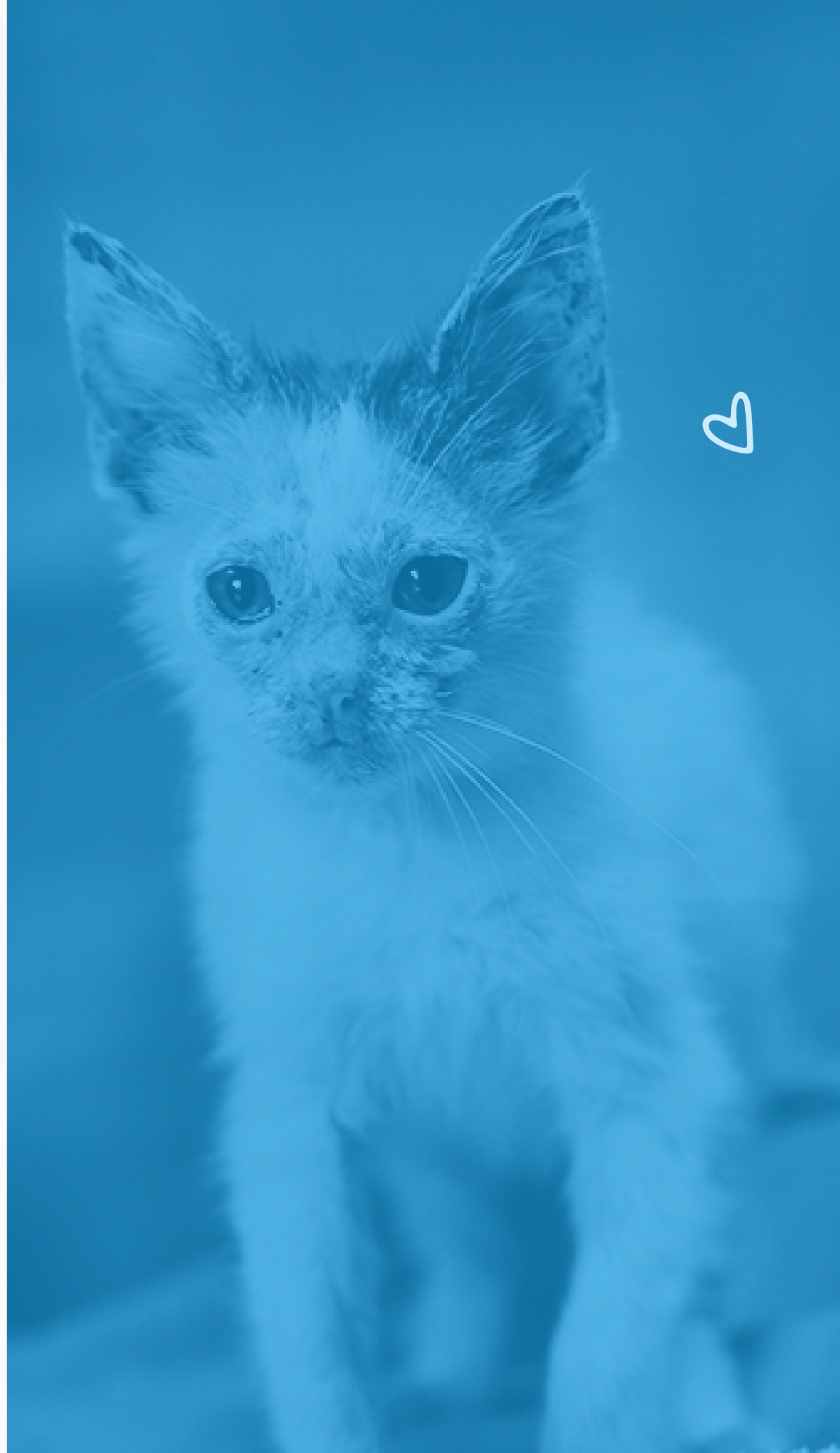
Not life-threatening, but can be persistent and highly contagious.

# FOR FOSTERS

- Wear gloves/wash hands when handling infected cats.
- Isolate the cat in an easy-to-clean area.
- Limit contact with children or immunocompromised individuals.
- Follow antifungal treatment protocols (oral and topical).
- Disinfect surfaces and wash bedding regularly.

# PREVENTION

- Regular screening in shelter settings, prompt isolation of infected cats.
- For Humans: Wash hands thoroughly, avoid close contact until treatment is underway.



A kitten with light-colored fur and dark stripes is looking through a circular hole in a wooden door. The kitten's eyes are wide and focused on the camera. The background is a solid blue color.

# Common Diseases

**2 FELINE PANLEUKOPENIA VIRUS (FPV)**

# FPV:

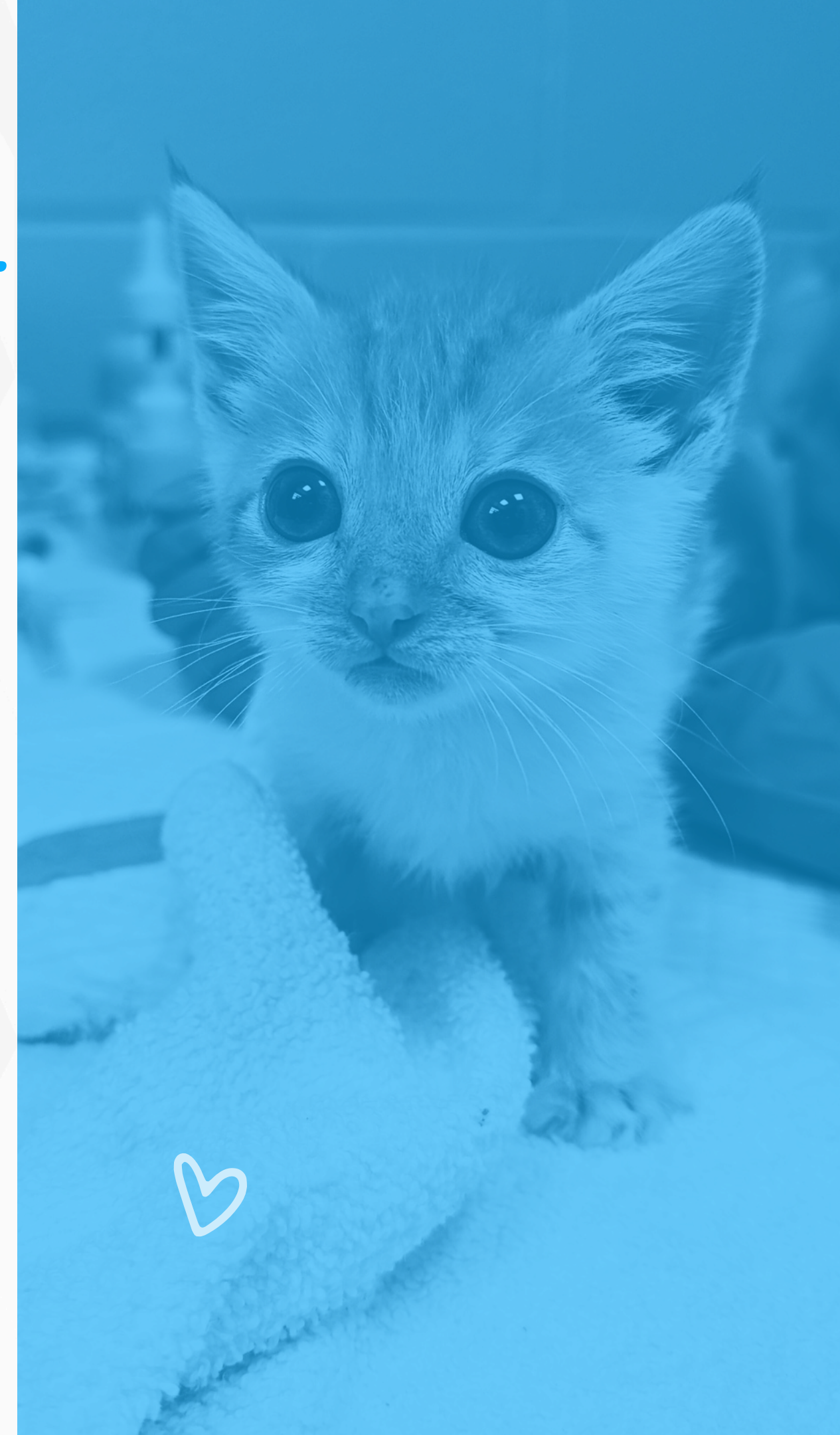
A highly contagious viral disease causing severe gastrointestinal and immune system damage.

**How it spreads:** Through feces, bodily fluids, contaminated surfaces, and the environment.

**Zoonotic Risk:** No

**Signs in Cats:** Vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, fever, reduced appetite, dehydration.

**Severity/Risk to Life:** Very high mortality, especially in kittens.



# FOR FOSTERS

- Isolate infected cats immediately.
- Wear gloves and use footbaths when entering the cat's space.
- Ensure hydration and supportive care.
- Follow veterinary instructions strictly.
- Maintain a clean environment with proper disinfection (bleach solutions).

# PREVENTION

- Vaccination is essential.
- For Humans: Practice strict hygiene to avoid carrying the virus on clothing.







# Common Diseases

3

**FELINE CALICIVIRUS (FCV)**

# FCV:

A viral infection primarily affecting the respiratory system, mouth, and sometimes joints.

**How it spreads:** Direct contact with infected saliva, nasal discharge, or contaminated objects.

**Zoonotic Risk:** No, humans cannot contract FCV.

**Signs in Cats:** Sneezing, nasal discharge, mouth ulcers, drooling, fever, limping syndrome.

**Severity/Risk to Life:** Usually mild, but severe strains can cause life-threatening pneumonia or systemic disease.



# FOR FOSTERS

- Provide a stress-free environment.
- Isolate infected cats from healthy ones.
- Monitor for worsening symptoms.
- Keep the cat hydrated.
- Administer medications (antibiotics for secondary infections, pain relief).

# PREVENTION

- Vaccination and minimizing overcrowding.
- For Humans: Maintain hand hygiene and clean surfaces frequently.



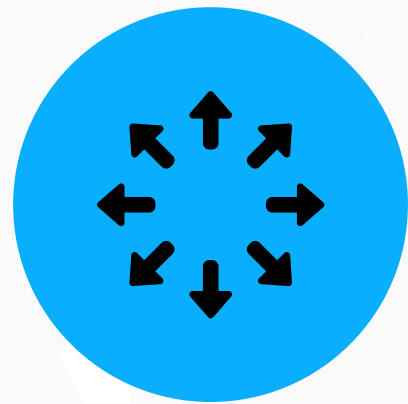


# Common Diseases

**4 FELINE UPPER RESPIRATORY INFECTION (URI)**

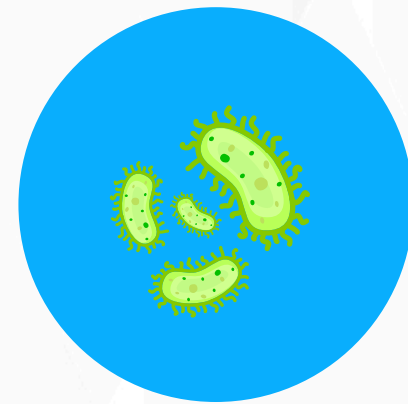
# URI:

A group of contagious respiratory illnesses caused by viruses and bacteria.



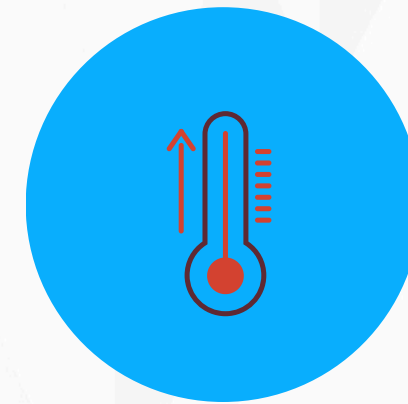
## How it spreads:

Airborne droplets, direct cat-to-cat contact, contaminated surfaces.



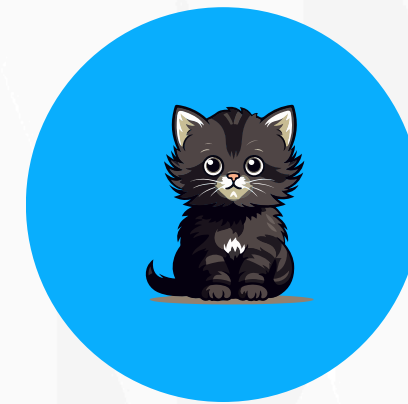
## Zoonotic Risk:

*Rare.* (Some bacterial infections may pose minimal risk.)



## Signs in Cats:

Sneezing, nasal/eye discharge, coughing, loss of appetite, fever.



## Severity/Risk to Life:

Usually mild but can become severe in kittens or immunocompromised cats.

# FOR FOSTERS

- Isolate affected cats.
- Use a humidifier to help with breathing.
- Clean eyes and nose gently with a damp cloth.
- Ensure hydration and nutrition.
- Administer prescribed medications (antibiotics if bacterial infection is present).

**DON'T HAVE A  
HUMIDIFIER?  
TRY A STEAMY  
SHOWER!**

# PREVENTION

- Vaccination and reducing overcrowding.
- For Humans: Practice good hand hygiene.



A fluffy white cat is the central focus of the image, sitting and looking directly at the camera. The background is a solid, vibrant blue. The cat's fur is very thick and soft-looking, with some darker patches on its face and chest. The overall mood is calm and serene.

# Common Diseases

**5** TOXOPLASMOSIS

# TOXOPLASMOSIS:

A parasite that affects multiple organs.

**How it spreads:** Ingestion of infected feces, raw meat.

**Zoonotic Risk:** YES – dangerous for pregnant women and immunocompromised people.

**Signs in Cats:** Often no symptoms, but may cause fever, lethargy, neurologic signs

**Severity/Risk to Life:** Most cats recover; can be serious in rare cases.

**Foster parents:** Recommend pregnant fosters avoid cleaning litter boxes  
If you have to clean litter box within 24 hrs!  
Report any neurologic signs in cats to your medical team!

**Prevention:** Litter box hygiene, no raw meat feeding.





# Common Diseases

- 6** **INTESTINAL PARASITES  
(ROUNDWORMS, HOOKWORMS, ETC.)**

# INTESTINAL PARASITES:

Worms inhabiting the gastrointestinal tract.

**How it spreads:** Ingestion of eggs from contaminated environments or mother's milk.

**Zoonotic Risk:** YES – can cause skin and organ issues in humans.

**Signs in Cats:** Diarrhea, bloated belly, weight loss, dull coat.

**Severity/Risk to Life:** Treatable but can be serious in kittens.

**Prevention:** Deworming, clean litter boxes frequently.

## COMMON TYPES OF WORMS IN CATS AND DOGS



Roundworm



Hookworm



Whipworm



Tapeworm



# Common Diseases

6 COCCIDIA

# **COCCIDIA:** A protozoan parasite that causes diarrhea.

**How it spreads:** Contaminated feces or environment.

**Zoonotic Risk:** No, humans cannot contract.

**Signs in Cats:** Diarrhea, weight loss, dehydration.

**Severity/Risk to Life:** Treatable, but reinfection is common.

**Foster parents:** Isolate from healthy pets  
Monitor for diarrhea, and make sure kittens keep eating and stay hydrated

**Care Tips:** Wet food, access to clean water, and cleaning litter box/environment frequently

**Prevention:** Use Rescue™ disinfectant, keep litter boxes clean.



# Common Diseases

**8 FELINE LEUKEMIA VIRUS (FELV)**

# FELV:

A viral infection that suppresses the immune system.

**How it spreads:** Saliva, nasal secretions, urine, feces, and milk from infected cats.

**Zoonotic Risk:** No, humans cannot contract FELV.

**Signs in Cats:** Weight loss, poor coat condition, fever, lethargy, anemia, recurring infections.

**Severity/Risk to Life:** Progressive disease often fatal over time.

**Foster parents:** Keep FeLV-positive cats isolated from non-infected cats. Monitor closely for infections.

**Care Tips:** Provide a low-stress environment. Regular vet checkups are essential.

**Prevention:** Vaccination and routine testing.



# Common Diseases

9 FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS (FIV)

# FIV:

A viral infection weakening the immune system.

**How it spreads:** Bite wounds from infected cats.

**Zoonotic Risk:** No, humans cannot contract FIV.

**Signs in Cats:** Weight loss, recurring infections, poor coat quality, oral inflammation.

**Severity/Risk to Life:** Progressive; can lead to fatal infections.

**Foster parents:** Prevent fighting with other cats. Monitor health closely.

**Care Tips:** Regular veterinary care.

**Prevention:** Routine testing, keeping FIV-positive cats indoors.







# Common Diseases

9 **FELINE INFECTIOUS PERITONITIS (FIP)**

# FIP:

mutation of feline coronavirus

**How it spreads:** Litter boxes, saliva, feces.

**Zoonotic Risk:** No, humans cannot contract FIP.

**Signs in Cats:** Lethargy, weight loss, fluid in belly (wet FIP), neurologic signs (dry FIP).

**Severity/Risk to Life:** Fatal without treatment. Prognosis getting better with newer treatments

**Foster parents:** Monitor for weight loss, fever, or distended abdomens, Not contagious

**Care Tips:** Long treatment expensive treatment

**Prevention:** Minimize stress, good hygiene.



# Prevention and Best Practices

## **1** VACCINATION PROTOCOLS: PROTECT BEFORE EXPOSURE

Vaccines are the best defense against many infectious diseases. Foster caregivers should ensure that all cats receive core vaccinations and boosters on schedule.



# CORE VACCINES

- **FVRCP** (Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus, Panleukopenia) – Given every two weeks for kittens until they are at least 20 weeks old.
- **Rabies** – Given at 12-16 weeks of age (required by law in most areas).

# NON-CORE VACCINES

**FeLV:** Helps prevent FeLV

Pros: Protects at risk cats in shelters or multi cat homes and reduces spread of FeLV.

Cons: Not 100% effective in preventing infection and an additional operational cost.

## FOSTER-SPECIFIC TIPS:

- Confirm vaccination status with the shelter before fostering.
- Ensure resident pets are fully vaccinated against shelter diseases
- Kittens should receive boosters every two weeks until 16-20 weeks old.
- Avoid exposure to unvaccinated cats and/or areas where unvaccinated cats might frequent until vaccines take full effect (typically two weeks after administration).

# Prevention and Best Practices

## 2 HYGIENE PRACTICES: MINIMIZE DISEASE SPREAD

Good hygiene helps prevent the spread of both zoonotic and cat-to-cat diseases.



# HYGIENE PRACTICES:



## Hand Hygiene:

Always wash hands before and after handling cats, cleaning bowls, or administering medications.



## Surface Cleaning:

Disinfect litter boxes, floors, and high-touch surfaces daily. ex: cell phones, keyboards, etc. Use Rescue™ Disinfectant.



## Laundry & Bedding:

Wash bedding, towels, and soft toys regularly with hot water and detergent. Dry on high heat to kill pathogens.



## Air Quality:

Use air purifiers to reduce airborne pathogens. Ensure proper ventilation in foster areas.

# Prevention and Best Practices

## 3 REGULAR VET VISITS

Communicate often and early with your medical team. Symptoms to catch diseases early.



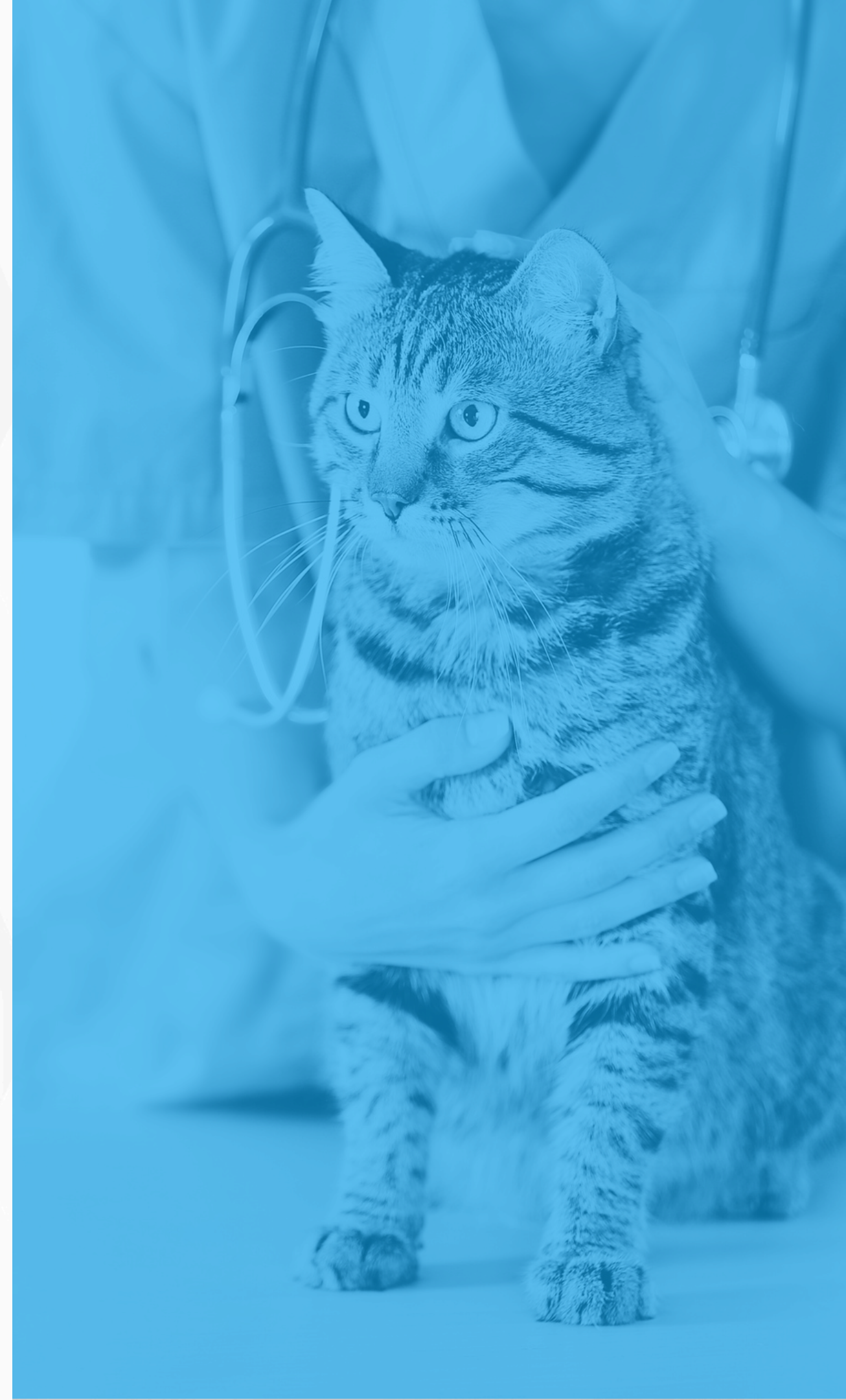
# WHEN TO CALL THE VET IMMEDIATELY

**Respiratory:** Severe congestion or difficulty breathing Swollen, crusty or cloudy eyes Excessive drooling/ulcers

**GI Issues:** Vomiting 2-3 times a day, diarrhea lasting more than 24 hours, lack of appetite > 24 hours

**Behavior Changes:** Lethargy, hiding, difficulty walking, unresponsive

**Skin/Coat Issues:** Patchy hair loss/crusty skin, overgrooming, or lack of grooming,





# Prevention and Best Practices

## **4** QUARANTINE & ISOLATION: PREVENT DISEASE TRANSMISSION

Newly fostered cats, especially those coming from shelters, should be isolated for at least 14 days before interacting with resident pets.



**A SPARE  
BATHROOM IS A  
GREAT PLACE TO  
QUARANTINE!**









# WHY ISOLATE:

- 🐾 Many diseases have an incubation period and may not show symptoms immediately.
- 🐾 Prevents the spread of respiratory diseases and other infections.



# ISOLATION GUIDELINES:

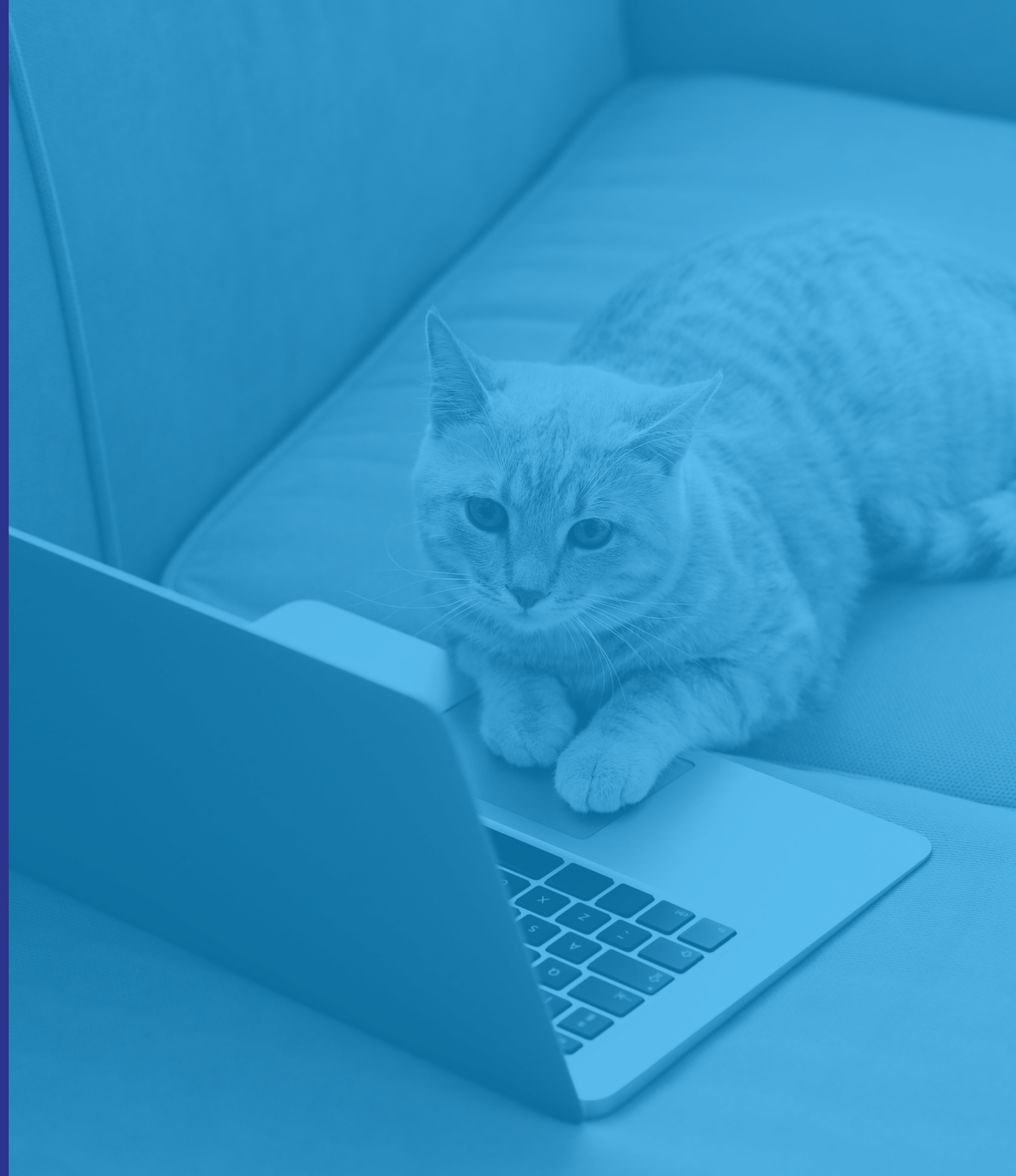
- 🐾 Use a separate space with its own bedding, toys, and feeding area. Bonus Points: easy to clean space!
  - 🐾 Wash hands and change clothes after handling an isolated cat.
  - 🐾 Monitor for signs of illness before introducing to other animals.
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# Prevention and Best Practices

5

## COMMUNICATION & REPORTING ILLNESS: PARTNERING WITH THE SHELTER

Foster caregivers are part of a larger veterinary team and should communicate promptly if they suspect illness.





## REPORTING SYMPTOMS:

- Keep detailed notes on symptoms, appetite, stool quality, and behavior.
- Send daily updates with photos/videos if a cat is sick.

**THE SOONER  
THE BETTER!**



## COORDINATING VETERINARY VISITS:

- Follow the shelter's protocol for vet care and medication administration.
- If directed, administer oral medications, dewormers, or subcutaneous fluids.



## RECORD KEEPING:





- Track vaccinations, medications, and any past illnesses in a logbook.





# FINAL THOUGHTS: FOSTER CARE IS PREVENTION!

**Foster caregivers prevent disease outbreaks by:**

-  Following vaccination and quarantine protocols.
-  Practicing excellent hygiene.
-  Recognizing early symptoms and seeking care quickly.
-  Providing stress-free environments for stronger immunity.

Your role in fostering helps save lives and keeps the community safe!



# Resources & Contact Information

- University of Wisconsin Shelter Medicine Program:  
<https://www.uwsheltermedicine.com>
- UC-Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program:  
<https://www.sheltermedicine.com/library/>
- Maddie's Fund

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**ONE TAIL  
AT A TIME**

