

FELINE UPPER RESPIRATORY INFECTION

What is URI?

Feline Upper Respiratory Infection (URI) is similar to a common cold in humans. It is especially common in cats that have been exposed to a lot of other cats, such as at an animal shelter or pet store. URI is very rarely fatal, and usually resolves within one to three weeks. Treatment generally consists of supportive care, though antibiotics may be given to treat possible bacterial infections.

Although secondary bacterial infections can make the problem worse, the underlying cause is often a viral infection. Viral infections are not cured by antibiotics – as with the common cold, there is no completely effective treatment aside from time to allow the cat's immune system to do its job. In rare cases, URI can progress to worse infections such as pneumonia. In addition, sick cats may not eat or drink adequate amounts and may become severely dehydrated. In those cases, hospitalization and fluid supplementation may be needed.

Can my other pets get URI?

URI is contagious to other cats. Most cats are vaccinated against it (it's part of the standard yearly vaccination program recommended by most vets). However, the vaccine is not 100% protective, so it is a good idea to isolate cats that are showing signs of the disease, and wash hands after handling sick cats. Cats may leave the shelter with no outward symptoms, but then start to show symptoms within a few days of being in a new home; stress can amplify and bring out URI symptoms. For this reason, we recommend isolating all new arrivals in your household for 7-10 days after adoption, to give them a chance to settle in and make sure they are not coming down with anything.

What are signs of URI

- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Red and/or runny nose
- Fever
- Lack of appetite
- Decreased energy
- Sores on the tongue, lips, nose or roof of mouth

What should I do if my new cat has URI?

- Provide the cat with a quiet, warm place to rest.
- Make sure the cat is eating. When cats get stuffy noses, they can't smell their food very well and may not want to eat. Offer smelly, wet food such as fish flavored canned cat food. Warming it up often helps.
- Gently clean the cat's nose and eyes with a soft cloth moistened with warm water.
- If the cat is very congested, use a humidifier or put the cat in the bathroom and run hot water in the shower for a few minutes a couple of times a day. Moderate to severe congestion is often a sign of a secondary bacterial infection, so contact your veterinarian to discuss treatment.
- If any medicine has been prescribed, be sure and give the full course as directed, even if the symptoms seem to have gone away.

When Should I Contact My Vet?

- You should contact your veterinarian if your cat:
- Has not eaten for more than 24 hours.
- Has green or yellow discharge from the nose or eyes (your veterinarian may prescribe antibiotics for this).
- Difficulty breathing, especially panting or breathing through an open mouth.
- Depressed or unresponsive cat: a slight decrease in activity is expected, but contact your vet if the cat is much less active than usual or than you would expect.
- Vomiting or diarrhea that lasts more than 24 hours.
- Little or no improvement after a week of home care.