

Upper Respiratory Infection

Upper respiratory infections are a contagious cold-like disease. Cats of any age or sex can be affected, but young kittens and unvaccinated adults are at highest risk. Breeds such as Persians are also at an increased risk as are other flat-faced breeds. Cats from multi-cat situations such as shelters or catteries are also at an increased risk.

Cold like symptoms are notable. These include sneezing, discharge from the nose and/or eyes, fever, lack of appetite, lethargy, and coughing. Signs usually last for about 7 days.

Upper respiratory infections are due to a virus and the two most common ones are feline herpesvirus (rhinotracheitis) and feline calicivirus. Direct contact with infected cats is the most common way for cats to become infected. Infections can also occur from food/water bowls or transmitted when owners come in contact with infected cats and carry the virus home to cats on their hands or clothing.

Though the disease is viral in origin, there are often secondary bacterial infections that are treated with antibiotics. Treatments with eye medications or decongestants are also used if needed; good nutritional support is important. More severe cases might require hospitalization.

Unfortunately cats can remain carriers of these viruses for months or years and stressful situations can cause a recurrence of the disease. Proper vaccines can help prevent infection.

