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## Here's what to do when cats catch a cold

We humans are at the start of our cold and flu season, and owners are asking me whether their cats can catch their colds.

The answer is probably not — at least not if you are dealing with a viral infection.



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The common cold that we contract is a virus, and most viruses are species-specific, which means humans get human vi-

rus and cats get cat viruses. Unfortunately, cures for human upper respiratory viruses do not exist, so treatment involves relieving symptoms and trying to prevent secondary bacterial infections. The same holds true for "kitty colds."

Just like with our human colds, kitty colds are contagious to other cats, and it is common for multiple cats to be affected in a household.

Kitty colds caused by viruses usually cause sneezing and a clear discharge from the nose and/or eyes. A more serious upper respiratory infection (a combination of a virus and a bacterial infection) would be characterized by fever, enlarged lymph nodes, yellow to green discharge from the eyes and nose, and loss of appetite. Antibiotics would be needed if these addition-

al symptoms were present, and they would fight the bacterial component of the infection.

Owners of indoor cats are surprised that their cats are able to contract upper respiratory infections without contact with other cats. Most of the viruses that cause these infections are airborne, and some are also transmitted through water. Since it is impossible to filter all outside air and water entering a home, indoor kitties are still at risk.

The basic cat booster vaccine provides protection against some common respiratory infectious agents. The vaccine is either a three-way containing antigens to feline rhinotracheitis, calici, and panleucopenia viruses, or a four-way that also includes chlamydia.

What should you do if you suspect your cat has an upper respiratory infection?

The first thing is to assess your kitty's ability to eat, drink, and breathe adequately. If the discharges are clear and the cat is eating and drinking relatively normally, then wiping the eyes and nose clear may be all that is needed.

If your cat is depressed, not eating or is having difficulty breathing, then he should probably be examined by your veterinarian. Cats that cannot smell may not eat well. You can try to help open your kitty's congested nose by placing him in a steamy bathroom or using a vaporizer. Do not give your cat any human over-

the-counter cold medications. Most of these products contain aspirin or acetaminophen that could be deadly to your cat.

For an upper respiratory infection, your veterinarian may prescribe antibiotics, antihistamines, nasal sprays, interferon (a drug that stimulates the body's cells to fight infection) or even the amino acid L-lysine (another compound that works against herpes).

Cats with upper respiratory infections sneeze a lot, and many owners want to do something to help prevent sneezing. Unfortunately, there is nothing you can give your cat for this. Pediatric saline nasal sprays can be safely used to help with nasal congestion.

The most important thing to remember if your cat has an upper respiratory infection is to be patient. Do not have unrealistic expectations on how long you think it should take for your cat to be 100 percent. If you think about the last time that you had a cold, it is likely you had sneezing and congestion that lasted anywhere from a couple of days to a couple of weeks. Even though you felt better after a couple of days, you were probably blowing your nose for quite a while longer. The same can be true for cats, so try to keep your kitty as comfortable as possible and seek veterinary advice if signs progress.

Dr. Wexler-Mitchell owns The Cat Care Clinic in Orange:  
[www.catcare.com](http://www.catcare.com)