

Feline Upper Respiratory Infection

What is URI?

Feline Upper Respiratory Infection (URI) is similar to a common cold in people. It is commonly seen in cats that have been exposed to a lot of other cats, such as in an animal shelter. Also, cats in a shelter are stressed, causing their immune system to be compromised.

URI is usually mild and resolves in one to three weeks. The underlying cause is often a viral infection, although secondary bacterial infections can make the problem worse. Viral infections are not cured by antibiotics and, as with the common cold, there is no completely effective treatment. Treatment generally consists of supportive care and time to allow the cat's immune system to do its job. Antibiotics may be prescribed if a bacterial infection is suspected.

In rare cases, URI can cause serious disease, such as pneumonia. Sick cats can also become dehydrated if they are not eating or drinking adequately. In such cases, hospitalization and fluid supplementation may be needed.

How contagious is URI?

URI is contagious to other cats. Most cats are vaccinated for URI (it is part of the standard 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 to wash your hands after handling sick cats. In general, we recommend isolating all new arrivals in your household for 7-10 days after adoption to give them a chance to settle in and to make sure they are not harboring any infectious disease.

One occasional cause of URI, *Bordetella bronchiseptica*, can be contracted by dogs and rarely can infect a severely immunocompromised person (for example – a person with AIDS or undergoing chemotherapy). If someone in your family is immunocompromised, please contact your physician prior to adopting a new pet.

What are the signs of URI?

Sneezing, nasal discharge, red eyes, ocular discharge, coughing, sores on the nose or in the mouth, fever, decreased appetite, and decreased energy.

When should you contact your veterinarian?

It is very important that you take your new pet to a veterinarian for a complete examination within 3 days of adoption (consult your adoption contract and associated adoption policies).

With rest and good care, many cats will recover from mild URI in one to two weeks. Supportive care at home would include offering plenty of fresh water and food (canned food may help keep your cat hydrated), providing a nice quiet place for your cat to rest away from children or other pets, gently wiping away any discharge from the eyes or nose with a soft cloth moistened with warm water, or using a room humidifier in the area where your cat spends the most time.

However, some cats may require additional support. Please contact your veterinarian if your cat has any of the following signs: yellow or green discharge from the nose or eyes, difficulty breathing (especially panting or breathing through an open mouth), not eating for more than 24 hours, significant decrease in activity, or no improvement after one week of home care.