



Cat Feeding

RISKS AND PRECAUTIONS

& Wildlife

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INTRODUCTION

Feeding cats, whether they are our furry friends at home or stray cats in the neighborhood, is an essential part of caring for animals. However, it's important to know the potential risks of feeding stray cats. Stray cats can carry various diseases, such as distemper, which not only affect other animals but also pose risks to human health.

This guide explores the potential risks associated with feeding stray cats and provides comprehensive guidelines for responsible and safe cat-feeding practices. Remember: responsible feeding is crucial for cats. Following these guidelines creates a healthier environment for all.



WHAT IS DISTEMPER

Understanding the potential risks of disease transmission between cats and wildlife critters is crucial.

Distemper is a **viral** disease caused by a **paramyxovirus** affecting both domestic and wild carnivores.

Distemper is highly contagious and can affect various animals, such as dogs, cats, and wildlife. (Raccoons, grey foxes, and skunks are particularly susceptible)

These diseases are transmitted through contact with the saliva of an infected animal, posing a threat to both your pets and local wildlife.

Distemper outbreaks arise when infected animals interact with unvaccinated ones, posing a risk to both wildlife and domestic pets.

This highlights the link between this disease and local wildlife.

Most cases occur in spring and summer, although outbreaks can happen at any time.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Highly contagious
- ✓ There is no cure
- ✓ Affects both domestic and wild animals
- ✓ Outbreaks spread very fast

TYPES OF DISTEMPER

Distemper is a formidable adversary, and understanding its various forms is paramount for effective management. Here, we explore the distinct types of distemper that impact different species.

CANINE DISTEMPER



Also known as "hard pad disease." It predominantly affects dogs, but its consequences can be far-reaching. This highly contagious and often fatal disease is caused by the Canine Distemper Virus (CDV), a member of the Paramyxoviridae family.

The symptoms of canine distemper can manifest in various ways, from initial fever and nasal discharge to more severe neurological symptoms like seizures and paralysis. These clinical signs make early detection vital for the best chance of recovery. Canine distemper presents a significant threat to the canine population, necessitating robust preventive measures, including vaccination.

FELINE DISTEMPER



The Silent Feline Killer in the feline world, the distemper goes by another name: feline panleukopenia. This condition, often referred to as "feline distemper," can be a silent but deadly predator. It predominantly targets cats, especially kittens, and is caused by the Feline Parvovirus. Feline distemper is highly contagious and can lead to severe illness or even death, particularly in young cats.

The symptoms of feline distemper may include fever, lethargy, vomiting, and diarrhea. Due to its severity, it's crucial to recognize these signs early on and seek immediate veterinary care. Vaccination against feline distemper is a fundamental aspect of feline healthcare, providing a crucial shield against this formidable form

Aerial Threats.

While distemper is often associated with mammals, it can also take flight. Avian distemper is a term used to describe its impact on birds. Birds, both wild and domestic, can fall prey to this viral menace. Although avian distemper is not as widely recognized as its mammalian counterparts, it poses significant threats to bird populations.

Symptoms in birds can vary, but they often include respiratory distress, nasal discharge, and gastrointestinal issues. Avian distemper emphasizes the need for vigilance in diverse animal populations. Preventive measures and awareness are key to protecting our feathered friends.

AVIAN DISTEMPER



SYMPTOMS

Discharge from the eyes and nose, dyspnea (difficulty breathing), coughing, and pneumonia are all symptoms that appear 10-14 days after infection. The most common symptoms are fever, anorexia, and respiratory tract problems.

Canine distemper virus (CDV) also causes gastrointestinal illness, thickening of the nose and footpads, and a neurologic phase with symptoms that are similar to rabies, making it difficult to distinguish.

It's crucial to note that the severity and combination of symptoms can vary based on factors such as the host's age, overall health, and the strain of the virus. Recognizing these clinical signs early on is vital for seeking prompt veterinary care.

Fever

Distemper often begins with a rise in body temperature, which may go unnoticed but is an early indicator of infection.

Nasal & Ocular Discharge

Many infected animals exhibit nasal discharge, often accompanied by discharge from the eyes. These discharges can be clear and watery or become thick and purulent.

Lethargy

Infected animals tend to become lethargic, losing interest in activities they once enjoyed.

Vomiting & Diarrhea

The virus affects the gastrointestinal tract, leading to digestive disturbances in infected raccoons causing vomiting and diarrhea

Coughing & Sneezing

Respiratory symptoms such as coughing and sneezing can develop, contributing to the virus's airborne transmission.

Neurological Symptoms

In severe cases, distemper attacks the nervous system, leading to seizures, tremors, muscle twitching, and paralysis. These neurological symptoms can be particularly distressing and often indicate an advanced stage of the disease.

Anorexia

A loss of appetite is common, which can exacerbate the animal's weakness and slow the recovery process.

Hard Pads & Nose

Canine distemper is known for causing the thickening of footpads and a hardened, dry nose, earning it the name "hard pad disease."



CAUSES & TRANSMISSION

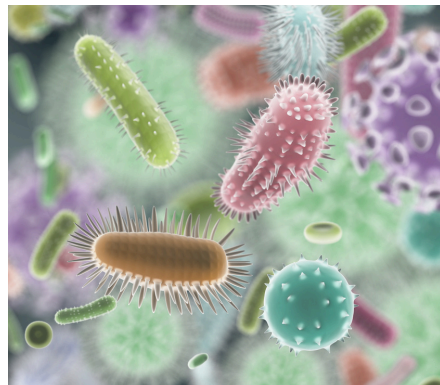
There is no cure, so preventative measures to reduce the risk of spreading the virus are key.

How Is Distemper Spread?

The Distemper virus is commonly transmitted through the air and bodily secretions. It can also be transmitted in a variety of other ways. Human hands, clothing, shoes, materials such as pet water bowls and other equipment that has come into contact with infected vomit or diarrhea can all spread distemper.

If not properly washed, human hands can spread the Distemper virus to new areas and animals. When handling unfamiliar animals, vomit, urine, blood, or feces, always wear gloves.

Pathogens are more easily spread when multiple animals share sheets, towels, and blankets. If a fabric is not properly washed, the Distemper virus can live on it, and when a person handles dirty linens or clothing, the virus can spread to that person's hands simply by holding the items.



Understanding the causes and transmission of distemper is fundamental in controlling its spread and protecting vulnerable populations.

Distemper is primarily caused by viruses belonging to the Paramyxoviridae family. For example, canine distemper is caused by the Canine Distemper Virus (CDV), while feline distemper is caused by the Feline Parvovirus. These viruses are highly contagious and can survive in the environment for extended periods, posing a persistent threat.

The transmission of distemper occurs through various routes:

- **Direct Contact:** Animals can transmit the virus through direct contact with bodily fluids, such as saliva, urine, and nasal discharge. Close interactions between infected and susceptible animals can facilitate transmission.
- **Airborne Transmission:** The virus can also be airborne, spreading through respiratory droplets when an infected animal coughs or sneezes. This mode of transmission makes distemper particularly insidious in shared environments.
- **Fomite Transmission:** Contaminated objects, like bedding or bowls, can harbor the virus. When animals come into contact with these contaminated surfaces, they can contract the virus.
- **In utero and Nursing Transmission:** In some cases, distemper can be transmitted from mother to offspring through nursing.

Recognizing the modes of transmission is essential for implementing effective preventive measures. Vaccination, strict hygiene practices, and isolation of infected animals are crucial strategies in curbing the spread of this viral threat.

Distemper's ability to infect a wide range of animals, from dogs and cats to birds and wildlife, underscores the need for a proactive approach to preventing and managing this disease.

Wildlife animals like raccoons can be carriers of diseases, including distemper. They roam around our neighborhood and eat from feeding stations and garbage areas.

Distemper outbreaks spread like wildfire among unvaccinated critters and can spread fast in the community if precautions are not taken to prevent them from entering your neighborhood.

One sick raccoon in your area can potentially infect other wildlife and even pets. It's like a domino effect of a disease.

HOW IT SPREADS

Transmission occurs from contact with infected saliva, urine, feces or respiratory secretions



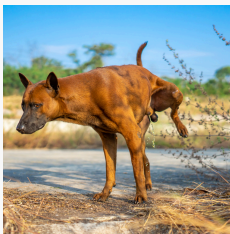
Saliva

When an infected critter (cat or raccoon) licks a bowl of food or bites another critter the virus can be present in their saliva.



Nasal Discharge

Nasal discharge can drop into bowls of food and water or the surface (i.e. pavement, feeding area). Also airborne when an animal sneezes.



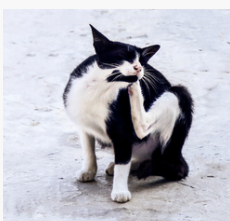
Urine and Feces

The virus is shed in animals' urine and feces. When an uninfected animal comes into contact with contaminated objects or surfaces, or other objects which have been soiled, they can ingest the virus or get it on their paws or fur, facilitating transmission through grooming or normal animal behavior. There is a high risk of contamination.



Blood

Although less common, the virus can also be present in an infected animal's blood and in a case of a fight for example, there's a risk of transmission through blood contact.



Fleas

Fleas themselves do not directly transmit distemper. However, they can indirectly contribute to the transmission of distemper by serving as vectors for other diseases.

IMPACT ON WILDLIFE & ECOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

It's important to understand that distemper is highly resistant and can survive in the environment for extended periods (needing either low temperatures or high to be eliminated) which is why it's crucial to clean and disinfect the feeding equipment and space.

Impact on Wildlife

Distemper isn't limited to domestic animals; it poses a significant threat to wildlife populations as well. Understanding its impact on the animal kingdom is vital for conservation efforts.

Distemper in Wild Animals

Wildlife species are susceptible to distemper, and its effects can be devastating. For instance, in North America, raccoons are frequently affected by distemper, and outbreaks can lead to a significant decline in their populations. Other wildlife species, such as foxes, skunks, and coyotes, can also fall victim to this viral disease.

Ecological Implications

Distemper outbreaks in wildlife can have profound ecological consequences. These outbreaks can disrupt predator-prey relationships and alter the dynamics of local ecosystems. For example, a decline in predators due to distemper can lead to an increase in prey species, which, in turn, can impact vegetation and other wildlife.

Zoonotic Concerns

Wildlife populations affected by distemper can pose a zoonotic risk. While distemper is primarily a disease of animals, certain strains can potentially cross the species barrier and infect humans. This highlights the importance of monitoring and managing distemper in both domestic and wild animals.

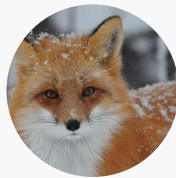


WHO CAN BE EFFECTED

Which Species Are Affected by Distemper?



Raccoons



Foxes



Wolves



Coyotes

Raccoons

Foxes

Wolves

Coyotes

Skunks

Dogs

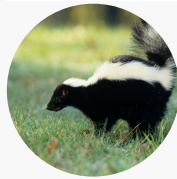
Mink

Ferrets

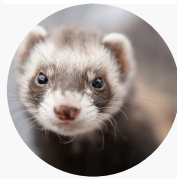
Cats

Bobcats

Skunks



Ferrets



Dogs



Cats



PREVENTION IS THE NAME OF THE GAME

Preventing distemper is a paramount concern for pet owners, caregivers, and animal enthusiasts. The following prevention measures are instrumental in safeguarding animals from this viral menace:

Hygiene Practices ★

Maintaining strict hygiene practices is crucial in preventing the spread of distemper. This includes regular cleaning and disinfection of food and water bowls, living spaces, and bedding.

Clean and sanitize bowls overnight using a bleach solution, rinse well, and put them back out at dawn after day breaks.

Limiting Exposure ★

If you're feeding wildlife, do so only during daylight hours.

Remember to bring in food and water bowls at night (before dark).

Minimizing contact between animals of unknown health status can reduce the risk of transmission. Avoiding visits to high-risk areas and crowded environments is advisable.

Wildlife Management ★

For those living in areas with a significant wildlife population, taking measures to prevent contact between domestic animals and wildlife can help mitigate the risk of transmission. This includes securing trash cans and avoiding feeding wildlife.

Disposable bowls ★

When feeding stray cats, using disposable bowls offers advantages in hygiene and disease prevention. They are always clean and free from contaminants, reducing the risk of disease transmission. Plus, they are portable, lightweight, and can be easily discarded after use, ensuring convenience without compromising hygiene.

 **Protect Your Pets and Wildlife!** 

FAQ

Can distemper spread from one species to another?

Distemper is typically species-specific, but certain strains can cross species boundaries.

Is wildlife conservation impacted by distemper outbreaks?

Yes, distemper outbreaks can have significant implications for wildlife populations and ecosystems.

Can distemper affect dogs?

Yes, distemper can affect dogs, especially those who are not vaccinated. Dogs and cats can both be vulnerable to distemper and can be at risk if they come into contact with contaminated elements.

What should I do if I encounter a sick raccoon in my area?

If you come across a sick raccoon, don't touch it!

If possible, and you have a large and sturdy container, use it to cover the raccoon.

Contact your nearest wildlife rehabilitator to report and follow their guidance.

**Let's Work Together
To Create A Safer Environment
For Everyone!**

Wildlife Rehabilitators/Animal Control in your area



App: Animal Help Now

Website: <https://ahnow.org/>

Online engine search

- Wildlife rehabilitators + (state initials)
- Wildlife rehabilitators near me
- Animal Control

Thank You





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