



Connecticut Humane Society  
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## Feline Upper Respiratory Infections

### *What is it?*

Feline URI (a “cat cold”) is a general term for any infection of the nasal passages, mouth, throat, eyes, and/or upper airways of the cat. URI is most often caused by a virus. About 90% of the time it is caused by a Herpesvirus (NOT human herpesvirus) and/or Calicivirus. Although your cat may recover from an active infection (one where he/she is showing signs), cats infected with herpesvirus are infected for life. Other infectious agents include Bordetella, Mycoplasma, Chlamydomphila, often combined in multiple infections.

### *What are the signs?*

Sneezing, nasal discharge, runny, red, or swollen eyes, coughing, oral or nasal ulcers, fever, hoarse voice, drooling, lethargy or a combination of these may all point to a URI.

### *How is it spread?*

Feline URI is not contagious to people but very contagious to other cats. It is spread through direct contact with an infected cat, or by contact with contaminated surfaces, like your hands or clothing. Up to 85% of all cats and kittens may be shedding feline herpesvirus at any one time, and up to 25% of all cats/kittens can shed calicivirus. When cats become stressed this increases the likelihood of virus shedding and disease spread. Suspected Calicivirus-positive cats or kittens should ideally not be brought into a household with other cats due to the long viral shedding period and the possibility of infection and/or disease in resident cats. Signs of disease may not appear for several days or weeks after exposure to the viruses or bacteria.

### *How is it diagnosed?*

The signs of respiratory disease are usually straightforward and most veterinarians are comfortable diagnosing URI without any testing. Some veterinarians may recommend testing if your cat is not responding well to therapy.

### *What is the treatment?*

Most cats and kittens recover in 7 – 10 days from mild infections. Even though 90% of cases are caused by viruses, there are currently no safe or effective antiviral agents for cats so most cats and kittens are prescribed antibiotics to treat and prevent secondary bacterial infections and conjunctivitis. In severe cases, congestion may be treated with nose drops or nebulization, fluids may be given under the skin or intravenously to treat dehydration and fever and food may have to be given by syringe or feeding tube if the appetite is severely depressed.

### *What should I do at home?*

Give prescribed medications if directed. Keep stress to a minimum and provide a high quality diet and fresh, clean water daily. Wash your hands after touching cats that have had an infection, especially if you have other cats and keep all of your cats current on vaccinations against respiratory disease.

### *What should I expect in the future?*

Signs of respiratory disease, lack of appetite, lethargy, or change in behavior or attitude should be reported to your regular veterinarian.