

## Can Rescue Kitten Mingle With My Other Cats?

**CatChannel expert Arnold Plotnick, DVM, offers advice on vaccinations and other care.**

*By Arnold Plotnick, DVM*

Posted: Jan. 23, 2009, 3 a.m. EST

**Q:** I found an orphaned kitten, which the vet has judged to be between 4 and 5 weeks old. I have four grown cats who are not up to date on their shots, although they completed all their first-year shots. They are 4-5 years old, and are strictly indoor cats. I keep the baby in a carrier away from the other cats. I wash my hands after touching it.

Although no contact has been made, I see my grown cats sniffing the air around the carrier. The vet said I can't get the baby tested for FIV and leukemia for another several weeks. What is the risk of having this baby around my other cats? Please advise — the vet said it should be OK — but then I read articles and it scares me to death. Thank you so much for taking the time to read this.

**A:** I commend you for taking care of this orphaned kitten. Your veterinarian is incorrect in stating that you cannot get the kitten tested for FeLV and FIV for several more weeks. The FeLV test is an antigen test. It can be done at any time. The only limiting factor is the ability to get enough blood from the kitten for the test. Most hospitals use the SNAP test, which requires three drops of blood. A skilled veterinarian or technician should be able to get three drops of blood from a 5-week-old kitten, and certainly a 6-week-old kitten. The FIV test is an antibody test. Kittens' antibodies are derived from the mother's milk, so a positive test means that the mother (but not necessarily the kitten) has FIV. A negative test means the mother was not infected, and for all practical purposes, the kitten is very unlikely to have FIV.

Your adult cats were vaccinated when they were young, and the vaccines they were given may protect cats against disease for many years afterward. It is advisable, however, to get your housecats revaccinated right away, even though they are strictly indoors. I would continue to keep the kitten away from the other cats until you know the FeLV status of the kitten. Use a separate food bowl, water bowl and litterbox. I'd also have the kitten evaluated by your veterinarian for ear mites, ringworm and fleas. Once the FeLV and FIV status of the kitten is known, and if it is negative, and your kitten has been checked for intestinal parasites and has been dewormed, then your cats can mingle. At 6 months of age, I would repeat the FeLV/FIV test.