

Why Is My Cat Sneezing?

CatChannel veterinary expert Arnold Plotnick, DVM, discusses upper respiratory viruses.

By Arnold Plotnick, DVM

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Q: Our cat is sneezing some each day — two to three times. She licks her nose after. Clear, sparkly eyes. No cough. No congestion. Eating and behaving normally. I volunteer at our local SPCA. The cats have “colds” frequently and sneeze on me. Have I brought home some infection? Could it be allergies? What symptoms would tell us to take her to our vet?

A: Allergies would be unlikely. Allergic respiratory disease in cats usually manifests as asthma, and cats will cough, not sneeze. I suspect your cat has a viral upper respiratory infection, however, the symptoms are so mild — two or three sneezes a day, no congestion, no loss of appetite, acting pretty normal — that I wouldn't be too concerned. Most cats have been exposed to the upper respiratory viruses during kittenhood, and are chronic carriers of the virus. When cats get stressed or immunosuppressed, the virus can re-emerge and cause clinical symptoms. These upper respiratory viruses can be spread to cats via articles of clothing, so yes, it is theoretically possible that you have brought the virus home with you. However, this is not the major mode of transmission. These viruses are spread mainly via aerosol from cat to cat.

I would take her to your veterinarian if: your cat's sneezing increases in frequency or severity; she develops a nasal or ocular (eye) discharge; she shows a decreased or absent appetite.