

Baby's First Checkup

Here's what you need to know for a stress-free and productive veterinary visit.

Susan Bertram, DVM

Normal body temperature for a kitten is 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit, give or take half a degree. If your kitten has a fever, vaccinations will be postponed until the cause can be identified and treated.

Testing 1-2-3 Has your kitten been tested for viral diseases, such as the feline leukemia virus (FeLV) and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV)? If not, your veterinarian should perform the tests at this time. It takes just two drops of blood to run these tests right in the clinic laboratory. Results arrive in about 10 minutes, which means you should have an answer before you leave the office. Don't panic if either test is positive. Antibodies from the queen will sometimes cause her kittens to test false positive for FIV, and a transient FeLV infection in most cats can be successfully defeated by a normal immune system. Your veterinarian will counsel you about quarantining the kitten to prevent infecting other cats, when to re-test (to either confirm a persistent infection, or rule it out), and how to best support your kitten's road to recovery. The stool sample you brought from home will be diluted with a special solution that floats invisible parasite eggs onto a slide for microscopic examination and detection. Common parasites in young kittens include roundworms and coccidian (single-celled parasites). Internal parasites can rob the kitten of nutrition, blood and protein from the digestive tract, but they are easily eliminated with proper doses of anthelmintics (de-wormers) or antibiotics in the case of coccidia. Expect questions such as: Where did your kitten come from (geographic area)? Did you purchase it from a breeder or adopt it through a shelter or neighbor? What does the kitten eat? Does it have any prior vaccinations or treatments? Is your kitten playful and active, or quiet and sleepy? Have you noticed any itching, coughing, sneezing, vomiting or diarrhea? Will the kitten be living strictly indoors? Your answers will help your veterinarian focus on the health concerns unique to your kitten's situation.

Let's Get Physical Though most young kittens are fairly gregarious, a veterinarian will try to "make friends" with your kitten prior to subjecting it to anything uncomfortable or scary. Perhaps he or she will first speak softly to the kitten, gently scratch it under the chin or behind the ear or stroke its back in a reassuring way. Once the kitten responds favorably and relaxes, the official physical exam can begin.