



HERPESVIRUS, MAIN CAUSE OF CAT FLU

ABCD experts recommend that more cats be vaccinated

Lisbon, 20 December 2006 —The European Advisory Board on Cat Diseases (ABCD) today published Europe's first vaccination guidelines for Feline herpesvirus-1 (FHV-1). The Guidelines recommend annual boosters to protect cats against FHV-1, the most common cause of feline upper respiratory disease (URD).

"For optimal protection against FHV-1, we recommend two primary injections in kittens, at an interval of 2 to 4 weeks, with the second vaccination given by 12 weeks of age. These should be followed by an annual booster. This protocol (two-shot primovaccination, annual booster) also applies to adult cats of unknown vaccination status and is irrespective of whether a killed or modified live vaccine is used," said Professor Etienne Thiry (Liege, Belgium), ABCD member and internationally recognised specialist on herpesviruses.

Lifelong carriers

While field infections may lead to a solid immunity, this comes at a cost of developing serious symptoms and spreading the disease among other cats. While the clinical signs usually resolve within one or two weeks, most infected cats become lifelong carriers. Once recovered, the virus remains latent in the trigeminal ganglia. Stress, such as boarding, parturition or moving house, may reactivate the virus, causing a relapse of disease and virus shedding. Reactivation may also be brought on by corticosteroid treatment. Latent carriers are a major source of new infections and therefore it is in the best interest of cat populations that all cats receive the correct vaccination protocol.

Annual boosters

Since FHV-1 infection is so common and causes severe disease, vaccination is considered essential in all cats – a 'core vaccine'. In view of currently available scientific evidence, the ABCD recommends annual boosters, especially for cats that are exposed to high-risk situations, such as boarding catteries, multi-cat households and cat shows. In situations evaluated as 'low-risk' (e.g. strictly indoor cats with no possible contact with other cats), three-yearly intervals may be an alternative option.

"Vaccination provides good protection against disease, resulting in over 90% reduction in clinical scores, and limits viral shedding and recrudescence," adds Professor Thiry.

"The ABCD appreciates that single-component FHV vaccines are unavailable and that those currently on the market are combinations with feline calicivirus

and other elements,” explained Professor Marian Horzinek (Utrecht, The Netherlands), ABCD chairman. “An annual booster to protect against FHV disease may therefore entail the injection of other antigens that may induce longer-lasting protection.”

FHV-1: debilitating and distressing

FHV-1 is the most common viral component of URD in cats. Although not necessarily deadly, the virus causes highly debilitating respiratory signs, distressing for the cat and its owner. Typically, FHV-1 affected cats will develop rhinitis and conjunctivitis as well as ulcerative, dendritic keratitis. Due to its high infectivity, it is a typical disease wherever large numbers of cats are housed together, such as boarding catteries, shelters, breeders and multi-cat households.

For further details and downloads of the full-text ABCD Feline herpesvirus disease guidelines, please visit www.abcd-vets.org. These guidelines also give recommendations for specific situations, such as immunocompromised cats, breeding catteries and cats undergoing corticosteroid treatment.

The guidelines on feline herpesvirus disease were adopted at the fourth meeting of the ABCD, held in Lisbon (Portugal) on 27-29 September 2006. At the meeting, the panel also discussed feline calicivirus disease, for which guidelines are currently in preparation.



Notes to editors

- The European Advisory Board on Cat Diseases is an independent panel of 17 leading veterinarians from ten European countries, with an expertise in immunology, vaccinology and/or feline medicine. The ABCD was set up to compile guidelines for the prevention and management of major feline infectious diseases in Europe, based on current scientific knowledge.
- Please visit www.abcd-vets.org for detailed background information.
- Interviews, pictures (speakers, diseased cats...) and the ABCD logo are available upon request.
- Animal healthcare company Merial helped set up the European ABCD and supports this initiative through funding. Merial is a world-leading, innovation-driven company, providing a comprehensive range of products to enhance the health, well-being and performance of a wide range of animals. For more information, please see www.merial.com.

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