

## **MEDICATING FERAL KITTENS**

### **Some Helpful Guidelines for Medicating Feral Kittens from [www.urbancatleague.org](http://www.urbancatleague.org)**

With sickly feral kittens try to use your vets most effective but least traumatic treatment available. Handling kittens unnecessarily to medicate them will set back the socialization process and sometimes make a timely socialization impossible.

Along with medical treatment remember to feed the most nutritious food possible. A healthy immune system can combat most ailments but needs premium quality food to fight the battle. Petguard, Wellness, Nutro, Eukanuba are among the best. Friskies and Wiskas are inferior but the best of the grocery store brands. Stay away from Deli Cat, 9 Lives, etc. if you want to keep the cats healthy.

Building a healthy immune response through a top quality diet can often heal a feral cat you can't treat.

Here are some of the simpler medical treatment options which don't require stressful or traumatic handling:

#### **FLEAS:**

When safe-handling is impossible, CAPSTAR pills crushed in food are a safe and effective flea treatment for cats and kittens 4 weeks and older. Capstar does not require a prescription and can be purchased online at any of the PetMeds-type websites. Capstar works in 3-6 hours at which time the cat/kitten may be brought anywhere without fear of risking flea infestation if you dispose of the infested bedding. The pills can be crushed and sprinkled onto a small amount of a tasty food. They have no unpleasant taste. Capstar has no residual effect so the cat/kitten must not be re-exposed to fleas. (Advantage, Revolution, etc. continue working for one month). Half of the cat pill is a safe dose for 4 week olds.

## **EAR MITES:**

REVOLUTION requires a prescription but will effectively treat Ear-Mites in one treatment; (it also treats fleas and roundworms effectively at the same time). Briefly handling of the cat/kitten is necessary to squeeze a small amount of the Revolution liquid onto the cat's skin between the shoulder blades. This can be done at the time of a vet exam or after the Spay/Neuter surgery. Other EAR MITE treatments require fourteen days of twice daily ear drops with a refrigerated product like TRESADERM. This is stressful and traumatic for fearful kittens. Cold ear drops twice a day for two weeks is not a good recipe for socialization. Some say Revolution doesn't work, but in the right dose, it has worked well for us every time.

## **VIRAL INFECTIONS:**

Treating eye infections can be very difficult but must not be neglected. Scarring and loss of vision is common with untreated Herpes virus eye infections (Herpes is the R in the FVRCP vaccination). If you are required to use the standard tubes of eye ointment (Terramycin, etc.) or drops, be sure to undo the bad experience of being restrained and treated for the eye problem, by spending extra nurturing time with the kittens before and after treating the eyes with the proper eye ointment or drops. Make sure you have the correct diagnosis since treating with the wrong eye medication can be useless or even harmful. Antibiotics have no direct effect ([read about Zithromax below](#)) on viral infections like URI (Upper Respiratory Infection) but often vets will prescribe one to treat or prevent a secondary bacterial infection. This is usually easily mixed into food without handling the cat. Make sure you can follow the directions precisely or don't treat the cat at all. Antibiotics are not a "hit or miss" medication to be played around with. Ask the vet if you're not sure! Zithromax (Azithromycin), has been found to be nearly 100% effective for resolving kitten and adult Herpes eye infections. Although it is an antibiotic and we all know they can't cure viral infections, vets are documenting that an

Azithromycin course of treatment resolve Herpes eye infections. It can be compounded with flavors and stirred into food, avoiding the need to restrain the animal to treat it. It can be ordered with a prescription from Vet-Centric and mailed to you. The medicine itself is not perishable but some of the flavor compounds are and need to be refrigerated, so try to stick with the non-perishable flavorings. We use the "Roasted Chicken and not the "Tuna" for example. The success of this treatment for herpes is unexplained and "off-label" so your vet may not be aware of this seemingly miraculous if counter-intuitive treatment. The eye ointment treatments are usually unnecessary if the Azithromycin is used.

## **PARASITES:**

Most vets give STRONGID for ROUNDWORMS as a matter of course (must be repeated once 14-21 days after first treatment). This can often be put in food and gobbled up without detection. Strongid is a very effective and safe medicine but will not resolve other parasites such as COCCIDIA or GIARDIA. These others are less frequently seen, but very common. Diarrhea can be very serious to kitten health and should not be neglected. An exact diagnosis can be difficult to get but if diarrhea persists, take a stool sample to your vet for testing. The test for Giardia is more expensive and not normally run as a matter of routine. Be sure to ask the vet if he thinks it is necessary and offer to pay the extra to have it done. The routine treatment for Giardia is 10-14 days, twice per day of a very bitter drug called Metronidazol or Flagyl. It is impossible to disguise this drug in food and usually makes the most tame housecat impossible to pill after one taste. One company has started making the drug in coated pill form but most Vets only stock the large dog size pill that breaks into powder when you dose it for cats. A better alternative for treating Giardia in the feral cat or kitten is Panacur liquid suspension. It comes in powder but the liquid is easier to mix in with food. It has a chalky taste which gives you a much better chance of sneaking it into food. It's a once per day treatment for only 5 days which is much less than the bitter pill regimen.

## **RINGWORM:**

One of my professors told me, "It takes 21 days for Ringworm to heal if you treat it and 3 weeks if you don't treat it." I once treated a young feral kitten for ringworm and she never was comfortable being handled as a result of the treatments. Her sister was too feral to be treated at all and she healed on her own with good nutrition.

Some strains of Ringworm respond very well to a double dose of the flea treatment PROGRAM. It comes in a chewable tablet form that is very palatable and can be crushed into food and cats gobble it up. This "off-label" use of PROGRAM to treat Ringworm is known by many vets but they sometimes don't know that you must double the flea treatment dose to get results. When it works you will see dramatic results right away. If the strain of Ringworm doesn't respond to PROGRAM, you'll have to wait for good nutrition to build an immune system response.

## **ANTIBIOTICS:**

Ever try to give antibiotics twice a day to a feral cat? If you have, you'll be jumping for joy as you read this news. There is an "off label" use for cefovecin (Convenia™) which allows a one-time injection that provides 7-14 days of antibiotic treatment for cats. This means that a feral cat which is discovered to have an infected wound or need teeth pulled at the time of TNR could get this one shot while still knocked-out for the neutering, and not need the twice daily regimen of antibiotics we've all faced in the past. Remember praying that s/he eats it in the food? Trying to pill them once or twice and then giving up, or risk a course of antibiotics yourself? Needing to hold the cat for treatment when you have nowhere to hold them!?! All of that is over!

It's termed "Off-label use" because Cefovecin (Convenia™), is only been tested and approved for treating dermatological problems but doctor's have found that it works for many other things and has the aforementioned 7-14 days of residual effect. This is similar to using Program™ to treat ringworm which is

actual a product for fleas. Studies have shown that the only side effects (rarely seen) may be some nausea for a couple days but don't last for the entire 7-14 days.

This is already in use in NYC at West Chelsea Veterinary on 26th street for one but hopefully your vet will be open to learning about using it too.

If your vet doesn't understand the challenges of socialization and building trust, there are many vets who do and will work with you to get the kittens to optimal health without using treatment methods that undo your hard work toward socialization. Ask around for a recommendation from one of the many groups working with feral cats.

The kittens AND YOU, deserve all the help and understanding you can get!!

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