

Shoal Creek Animal Clinic Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can I give my pet my cold?

Dogs and cats do not catch human colds. In addition, while dogs and cats do get upper respiratory infections, these illnesses are species specific and do not affect people. However, ferrets are very susceptible to the human influenza virus.

2. Can dogs have allergies?

Both dogs and cats can suffer from allergic conditions. Usually, our pets' allergic problems manifest themselves with very itchy skin rather than a runny nose or itchy, watery eyes as is common in people.

3. Is there something I can give my cat/dog to keep him calm on a car trip?

Sedation during travel is only recommended when absolutely necessary. Most sedatives will decrease a pet's ability to regulate body temperature and the pet may become overheated or hypothermic during travel. When a pet's anxiety over travel merits sedation, it should be under the instruction of your veterinarian.

4. How can you tell if a cat/dog might be pregnant?

It is difficult to detect pregnancy in a pet simply by observation before 45 days. At this point the owner may observe slight abdominal and mammary gland enlargement. Although a veterinarian may be able to palpate puppies or kittens in the womb as early as 21 days, currently, the most definitive early detection test is ultrasonography.

5. My cat is coughing. What do you think it might be?

There are many possible causes of coughing in cats including such things as hair balls, upper respiratory infection, parasites, and heart disease. It is advisable to have your pet examined by the veterinarian if it is coughing.

6. My dog eats feces. What can I do to make him stop?

The clinical term for this behavior is coprophagia. There is much debate over why some dogs are coprophagic. This habit could result in intermittent gastrointestinal upset and parasitism. Dogs differ in whether they eat the fecal material of other animals or their own or both. If the pet consumes its own feces, or that of another household pet, the behavior may be reduced with the addition of certain food additives. These products can be found at pet stores or the veterinarian.

7. How old does a cat/dog need to be to get its first shots?

Puppy and Kitten vaccinations are begun at 6 to 8 weeks of age.

8. When should I have my dog/cat spayed/neutered?

It is generally recommended that a pet be 6 months of age before being spayed or neutered. Some animal welfare groups are advocating what is known as an "early spay/neuter" performed as early as 8 weeks. There is debate within the medical community regarding the safety of this practice. Most feel that the maturity gained at 6 months minimizes anesthetic risk and facilitates the surgical procedure due to increased size.

9. How often do cats go into heat?

Unlike dogs which cycle every 6 to 8 months, cats are "seasonally polyestrous." This means that during the breeding season they may be in and out of heat multiple times.

10. How long does a cat/dog pregnancy last?

Pregnancy in dogs and cats lasts about 63 days.

11. What vaccines should I get for my dog/cat?

Dogs	Cats
Rabies	Rabies
"Distemper" (Distemper, Parvo, and Hepatitis)	"Distemper" (Panleukopenia, Rhinotracheitis, Calicivirus)
+/- Infectious Tracheobronchitis (Kennel Cough, Bordetella)	+/- Feline Leukemia
+/- Leptospirosis	+/- Feline Immunodeficiency Virus
+/- K9 Influenza	
+/- Lyme Disease	

12. My dog has a bald spot. What could it be caused by?

There are many possible causes of hair loss in pets. The three most common are Ringworm, Mange, and Fleas. Any sign of hair loss should be evaluated as some of the causes can affect the pet owner as well.

13. My dog is limping but I don't think its leg is broken. What should I do?

Have your pet evaluated by your veterinarian! Lameness (limping) can be a sign of numerous problems other than a broken bone. Lameness can be the result of anything from a thorn in a toe pad to a neurological disorder.

14. How do I treat my cat for hair balls?

Hair balls can be a very serious cause of illness in cats. Treatment consists of "lubing the tube," that is, administering a gastrointestinal lubricant which will assist in the movement of hair out of the gastrointestinal tract. The hair may be vomited or passed in the feces. There are many³ commercially available products on the market. Treatment should be administered on a regular basis. For most cats this means daily treatment. A newer approach is the use of cat foods formulated with increased fiber for assistance in moving hair through the gastrointestinal tract.

15. How often should my dog/cat have his teeth cleaned?

Routine dental cleaning is an important part of preventive health care for our pets. The necessary frequency of professional cleaning differs from pet to pet. However, on average, most pets need a dental cleaning each year. If your pet will tolerate it, regular brushing at home can also significantly improve dental health.

16. How do I know if my dog/cat needs to have his teeth cleaned?

A certain sign of needing dental cleaning is halitosis. However, one should not wait until the pet's breath is offensive to have a dental cleaning. Lift the pet's lips away from the teeth and

carefully observe the teeth for plaque and tartar. Pay careful attention to the gum line for any signs of inflammation (gingivitis).

17. What do you think about having a cat declawed?

Some find declawing objectionable as it entails the amputation of the distal bone on each toe. Most in the veterinary profession believe the procedure to be a necessary solution to a difficult dilemma- cohabitation with a cat who scratches and claws people and/or furnishings. Declawing does not cause any long term medical problems for a pet. However, a declawed cat is at a defensive disadvantage and should not be allowed outdoors. Declawing is an irreversible procedure and should be carefully considered by a pet owner and discussed with their veterinarian before being performed.

18. My dog was playing with a dead fox, raccoon, etc... in my yard. Should I be worried?

Yes. Any contact with wildlife should be considered a potential exposure to Rabies. The current recommendation for a companion animal that is current on vaccinations is to be "reboostered" for Rabies after a possible exposure and be observed for a period of 45 days. If the dead wild animal is available, it may be necessary for it to be tested for Rabies. This decision should be made by local public health officials.

19. My dog ate some chicken bones out of the garbage. What should I do?

Be watchful for any sign of gastrointestinal distress - vomiting, diarrhea, inappetence, etc. If any of these symptoms develop, take your pet to be evaluated by your veterinarian. Finally, ensure that it does not happen again by relocating or securing the garbage canister.

20. My cat is urinating outside of his litter box. What could cause this?

There are two main reasons for inappropriate elimination. It is either the result of a behavioral problem, or it is the result of a medical problem. It is very important to rule out a medical condition before assuming the cause is behavioral. Cats are very prone to lower urinary tract disease and some of these conditions can be life threatening in a very short time. Veterinarians feel that cats who are exhibiting abnormal elimination should be evaluated as soon as possible.

21. My dog has not pooped at all today. When should I be worried?

"Irregularity" can affect dogs as well as people. Pets may on occasion go 12 to 24 hours without a bowel movement. If your pet is otherwise normal, this is most likely not an emergency situation. However, if your pet is attempting to defecate without success (i.e., straining) he/she should be seen by your veterinarian.

22. Is the pet food at the store for urinary tract health the same as the urinary diet the doctor prescribed?

No. The urinary tract diets sold by veterinarians are prescription diets and can not be dispensed outside of the doctor/patient relationship. Like all prescription items, they should not be used except under a doctor's supervision. Those sold at the grocery store could be fed to any pet and, thus, are not as effective for the specific problem.

23. What is the recovery time for a spay/neuter.

The recommended period for restricted activity after a spay or neuter is ten days. During this time the pet should not be allowed to run, jump, or play. This is often challenging for the pet owner. For dogs, this definitely means the pet should always be on lead when outdoors. With some pets, it is necessary to confine them to a crate for this period of convalescence.

24. What is the best shampoo to use to bathe my dog?

It is important to use a product specifically formulated for pets. Veterinary dermatologists have found there is a significant difference in the pH tolerances between pets and people. Of the pet shampoos available, most are excellent products. Pet owners have a tendency to over bathe their pets. Unless a pet is actually dirty, bathing should be limited to every 4 to 6 weeks. There are medical conditions that might require more frequent bathing and the use of special shampoos. If a pet owner feel the need to bathe their pet more frequently due to "pet odor," it is recommended that a non drying, moisturizing shampoo be used.

25. How does a cat/dog get tapeworms?

Tapeworms require an intermediary host...that is, they "hitch a ride" to get inside out pets. The most common tapeworm species affecting dogs and cats is Dipylidium caninum. The immature form of this tapeworm resides in the body of a flea. When a pet grooms itself and swallows a flea, the tapeworm then completes its life cycle and matures into an adult worm in the pet.

26. If one of my pets has tapeworms, should I assume they all do?

This is not necessarily the case. Remember, the pet must first swallow a flea that is carrying the tapeworm in order to become infected. Tapeworms shed sections of their body called proglotids. These sections are expelled from the anus of the affected pet. This is the most common way a pet owner identifies that their companion animal has a tapeworm infection. If your environment has a heavy flea burden, it is more likely that more than one pet will have tapeworms.

27. How long should I wait to have my dog spayed to be sure she is not in heat?

Medically, there is not a problem spaying a dog while she is in heat. As the surgeon has to perform more ligatures of vessels, there is usually increased cost due to more surgical supplies and a slightly longer anesthesia time. If you are waiting in order to avoid the added fee, you should wait much longer than the accepted three week duration of the average heat cycle. The internal physiological changes that add to an "in heat" spay procedure can persist for twice that length of time.

28. Is it better to wait to spay my dog/cat until she has had her first heat?

No. This is no longer considered to be true. It has been medically proven to be beneficial for the pet to be spayed before the first heat cycle. In dogs, for example, the statistical likelihood of developing mammary cancer goes down the earlier in life a pet is spayed.

29. Why does my dog scoot across the floor?

The three most common reasons for scooting are parasitism (worms), full anal sacs, or itchiness secondary to allergies. (Anal sacs hold glandular secretions and are located near the anus). These conditions merit evaluation by your veterinarian as soon as possible.

30. How long should I feed my pet puppy food?

There is debate amongst experts in regard to this questions. Most feel it is not necessary to feed your pet puppy/kitten food beyond their first year of life. One can begin weaning them off of these foods as early as 12 months. Very large or giant breed breeds may benefit from these foods for up to 18 months.

31. What should I do to help my cat loose weight?

Cats should never be placed on a crash diet. Weight loss must be achieved slowly and are best accomplished under the supervision of a veterinarian. Weight loss, in theory, is quite simple: utilize more energy than is consumed. In practice, however, weight loss can be challenging with cats. Cats are considered to be "volume eaters" which means they have a certain desire to feel a customary sense of fullness. For this reason, prescription diet foods have been developed for cats and are available through veterinarians. Exercising a cat can be a challenge. Toys which encourage activity can be a great asset to weight loss.

32. How can I tell if my pet is dehydrated?

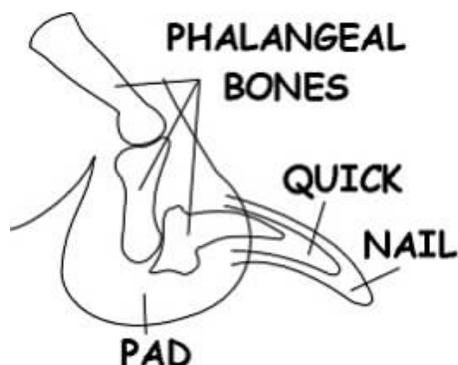
There are two ways one can evaluated a pet's hydration status. Lift the lips and gently rub your finger along the gums. If they are moist and your finger slides easily, the pet is not significantly dehydrated. If your finger sticks to the gums and does not slide, the pet should be taken to the veterinarian. The second way to evaluate hydration is know as the "skin turgor test." Pick up on the skin over the shoulder region (the "scruff") and give the tissue a twist. If it springs back to its normal position quickly, the pet is not significantly dehydrated. If the skin stays up in a "tented" position, or slowly returns to normal, the pet needs veterinary care.

33. My pet ate one of my prescription pills. What should I do?

We would recommend having your pet examined by a doctor. It may be necessary for the doctor to consult with an animal poison control service depending on the type of medication ingested.

34. What is the best way to trim my pet's nails?

Most pet owners prefer to let their veterinarian or groomer trim nails as it can be a painful procedure if not done properly. However, the technique is not difficult to learn and your veterinarian can provide a visual demonstration of how to trim nails. It is a good idea to accustom your pet to nail trimming early in its life. Use of a Rescoe® brand nail trimmer is highly recommended. The Rescoe® works like a guillotine, cutting the nail to the appropriate length. The nail is inserted into the non-bladed side of the device just before the "quick." This illustration shows the basic anatomy of a pet's toenail.



35. Is it OK to have the stray kitten I found around my other cat?

Any stray should be evaluated by a veterinarian before being allowed to interact with a pet. Most importantly, the pet should be checked for infectious and parasitic diseases. If circumstances prevent an immediate trip to the veterinarian's office, keep the stray isolated until an office visit can be made.

36. Why do I have to have my dog tested for heartworm disease every year even though he's been on preventive?

Heartworm preventives are prescription drugs. State pharmaceutical laws prohibit the dispensing of prescription drugs without both a valid doctor-patient relationship and proper evaluation for the use of a particular drug. The minimum standard of care with regard to heartworm preventives is an annual physical examination and heartworm test. Dogs are exceptionally susceptible to heartworm disease. There have been reported cases of infection in those on heartworm prevention. This may be due to a lapse in administration on the part of the owner or regurgitation of the medication without the owner's knowledge. Regular testing will catch such cases early, increase the likelihood of successful treatment, and prevent possible complications from placing a heartworm infected dog on preventive.

37. Will it harm my pet to get another dose of heartworm preventive, because I can't remember if I gave it this month?

No. Heartworm preventives have a high safety margin. If in doubt, it is safe (and recommended) to repeat the dose.

38. Can my pet get heartworm disease if I'm a week late giving the preventive?

This is very unlikely with the newer monthly heartworm preventives available.

39. My dog's nose is dry. Does that mean he's sick?

Not necessarily. There is a considerable amount of confusion regarding the importance of a cold, warm, wet, or dry nose in a dog and what it signifies about the animal's health. There is no standard which applies to all pets in all situations. Most dogs will periodically lick their nose and, due to evaporation, most wet noses feel cold. One might think, therefore, that a healthy dog has a wet, cold nose. However, not all dogs repeatedly lick their noses. Since a dog's body temperature is several degrees higher than our own, a dry nose in a healthy dog may feel warm to the touch. There are much more important signs to look for to assess your pet's health than the moisture and heat status of its nose. (For example, vomiting, diarrhea, coughing, sneezing, loss of appetite, loss of energy, increased water consumption, increased urination, etc.)

40. What's the best way to introduce my new puppy/kitten to my other pets?

The best way to introduce any new pet is to do so gradually and with the use of a safety barrier. This can be as simple as having both dogs on a leash or as involved as having two cats view each other from within separate carriers. Dogs often do best if they meet on "neutral" territory; that is, have them meet somewhere other than home...on a walk or at the park, for example. See the following article in The Shoal Creek News for more about introducing two cats - *New Cats*.

41. How often should my pet receive vaccines?

We have the benefit of offering several vaccines which provide duration of immunity for 3 years. However, many of the vaccines used in veterinary medicine continue to require annual or semiannual revaccination for adequate protection of your pet.

42. Do I need to test my cat for heartworm disease...he never goes outside?

Heartworm disease is spread by mosquitoes which are able to enter our homes. Research has shown that indoor cats actually have a higher incidence of heartworm disease than outdoor cats. (This may be due to the more sheltered immunological system in indoor cats.)

43. I don't ever board my dog. Do I still need the tracheobronchitis vaccine?

Many cases of Infectious Tracheobronchitis (ITBC) are diagnosed in dogs who are not boarded. ITBC is a highly contagious respiratory disease which is easily spread through aerosolized particles. An infected dog could be passing through one's yard and be a source of infection for a more sheltered pet.

44. How old does my pet have to be to have a rabies vaccine?

Generally, we administer rabies vaccinations at twelve weeks of age or older.

45. Is it OK to give my pet heartworm prevention even though he is sick?

This depends on the type of preventive you are using and the nature of the illness. Consult with your veterinarian.

46. I think my dog has an ear infection again. Can I just pick up some medicine and treat it the same way I did last time?

Although the symptoms may resemble the previous illness, it is not necessarily true that the causes are the same. Many different pathogens and medical problems can have similar clinical symptoms. It is not only improper medical practice but also a violation of pharmaceutical law for a doctor to dispense medication without evaluating the problem first. Further, some pathogens may develop resistance to previously used medications.

47. Can I catch mange from my dog?

Possibly. There are several different types of "mange" in dogs. Sarcoptic Mange, or Scabies, is contagious between people and pets. This is known as a zoonotic disease. If your pet has Sarcoptic Mange, treat as directed by your veterinarian and watch for any rash-like symptoms on your own skin. If they develop, seek medical advice from your physician.

48. How do I remove a tick from my pet?

Do not grab the tick with your fingers. Use an implement such as tweezers or a medical hemostat. Grab the tick as close to the skin as possible. It is important that all of the tick be removed, including the mouth parts. If you live in an area where the tick burden is high, consider preventive measures such as the use of Frontline Plus or K9 Advantix.

49. It is supposed to get down to freezing temperatures tonight. Is there anything I need to do for my outdoor pets?

Pets should have protection from the elements. This means an enclosure which keeps out wind, rain, snow, etc. Also, there should be some form of bedding - blankets, etc. A heat source is

recommended by most veterinarians. This can be as simple as a light bulb inside a dog house or as elaborate as a commercially available heated pad.

50. What is involved in "microchipping" my pet?

Microchipping is a pet retrieval system which provides safe, lifelong identification and significantly enhances the chances of retrieving a lost pet. Permanent identification is provided by a tiny microchip that can be implanted quickly and safely in a dog or cat. The microchip, about the size of a grain of rice, is programmed with a unique, unalterable code that can be identified with a handheld scanner. These scanners are in thousands of veterinary offices, animal shelters, and animal-control agencies around the country. When one's pet receives the microchip, registration is made with an animal recovery database. These data bases are accessible 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, usually through a central 800 number. Microchip implantation is inexpensive, costing around \$55.00. Registration of the microchip for the lifetime of the pet is included in this fee.

51. What can I do to get my cat to stop spraying?

There are many possible causes for "spraying." Territorial marking is the most common among non neutered animals. If your cat is intact, it should be spayed or neutered. Other possible causes include both behavioral and medical conditions. It is very important to rule out a medical condition before assuming the cause is behavioral. Cats are very prone to lower urinary tract disease and some of these condition can be life threatening. Veterinarians feel that cats who are exhibiting abnormal elimination should be evaluated as soon as possible.

52. Is it OK to give my cat some milk occasionally as a treat?

As cats age, their ability to digest milk fats and proteins often declines. The traditional belief that cats should get a saucer of milk may be the cause of vomiting or diarrhea. If you would like to give your cat a treat periodically, use commercially available cat treats that have been designed with your pet's health in mind.

53. Is it OK to give my dog real bones to chew on?

Most veterinarians do not recommend allowing dogs to chew on real bones. Bones are either too soft and result in fragments which can cause GI tears or obstruction or the bones are too hard and lead to fractured teeth. Contrary to popular belief, domestic dogs are not just like their wild cousins (wolves, coyotes, and foxes). Commercially available chew toys are the best for our pets.

54. My cat is going to the litter box constantly but doesn't seem like he is urinating much. Why would he do this?

This could be the result of either a urinary tract infection or a blockage. Consider this situation a medical emergency and have your cat examined by your veterinarian right away.

55. Is it OK to give my dog Pepto Bismol® for his upset stomach?

Pepto Bismol® may be used in pets for certain gastrointestinal problems. However, it is very important to consult with your veterinarian BEFORE giving ANY drug to your companion.

56. How can I tell if my cat has ear mites?

Cats who have ear mites often scratch incessantly at their ears and face and shake their head. In addition, there may be large amounts of dark, crumbly, waxy material in the ear canals. This is a combination of ear wax and the excrement of the mites. Ear mites are easily treated when properly diagnosed. The definitive test is microscopic examination of the otic exudate. If you suspect ear mites, have your pet examined by your veterinarian.

57. My pet was treated with Frontline/Advantage/Advantage Multi/Advantix etc... but I'm still seeing fleas. Does this mean that the product doesn't work?

There is no product available that will completely keep fleas from getting on your pet. Seeing some fleas is normal. The fleas you do see will be dead or dying within 24 to 48 hours of coming in contact with the treated pet. If you have been treating your pet as directed with one of these products for a minimum of three months and are still seeing a large number of fleas, you should contact the manufacturer. Each of these products has a 100% satisfaction guarantee and a toll free customer service number. In some cases it may be necessary to try a different product to see if it is more effective for your pet's needs.

58. My pet is constantly scratching but I do not see any fleas. What could be causing this?

The laundry list of possible causes of excessive scratching is quite long. Parasites are certainly at the top of the list (fleas, ticks, mange, etc.) However, there are many other causes which can be much more difficult to diagnose. Allergic, bacterial, fungal, metabolic, neoplastic, and even psychological disorders can cause pruritis, the sensation that provokes the desire to scratch, rub, chew, or lick. All animals will scratch occasionally but constant scratching is abnormal and should be evaluated by your veterinarian.