

Companion Cats

Code of Welfare

1 October 2018

TITLE

Code of Welfare: Companion Cats

COMMENCEMENT

This Code of Welfare comes into force on 1 October 2018.

REVOCATION

This Code of Welfare revokes and replaces the Animal Welfare (Companion Cats) Code of Welfare 2007, dated 2 March 2007.

ISSUING AUTHORITY

This Code of Welfare is issued by the Minister of Agriculture, by a notice published in the Gazette, under section 75 and 76 of the Animal Welfare Act 1999, after having complied with the matters specified in section 75(1) and 76(2).

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Introduction

This introduction is not part of the Code of Welfare, but is intended to indicate its general effect.

Purpose

The purpose of this Code is to provide information to the owners and persons in charge of companion cats, including cats in breeding establishments, boarding catteries, animal welfare shelters and pet shops, about the standards they must achieve in order to meet their obligations under the Animal Welfare Act 1999.

This Code of Welfare encourages all those responsible for companion cats to adopt the highest standards of husbandry, care and handling, and to equal or exceed the minimum standards.

Cats are the most commonly owned companion animals in New Zealand. Unlike commercially farmed animals, the vast majority of cats are kept for their intrinsic nature as loved and loving companions. While individual cats exhibit widely varying natures, they also share some common characteristics, such as an instinct for predation. Hunting is a normal part of a cat's behaviour, and some cats (such as those on farms and in commercial premises) are kept mainly for the purpose of controlling rodent populations. The question of protecting wildlife is outside the scope of this Code.

Background

The Animal Welfare Act 1999 provides for the welfare of animals in New Zealand. It puts obligations on people who own or are in charge of animals to provide for the welfare of their animals.

The Act establishes the fundamental obligations relating to the care of animals and provides for the development and issue of codes of welfare.

Codes of welfare expand on the basic obligations of the Act by setting minimum standards and recommending best practice for the care and management of animals.

This Code of Welfare also references regulations issued under the Animal Welfare Act 1999. Regulations are prescribed under the Animal Welfare Act and impose enforceable requirements on owners and persons in charge of animals. For ease of reference, regulations relevant to this Code are set out in an appendix to this Code. Penalties for failure to comply with the regulations are specified in the relevant regulations. The appendix to this Code is not intended to provide an exhaustive list of all obligations under the Act or regulatory requirements. Owners and persons in charge of animals are responsible for ensuring that they are aware of and understand all Act and regulatory requirements that are relevant to them.

Who should read this Code of Welfare?

This Code is intended for all persons responsible for the welfare of companion cats.

Under the Act the "owner" and every "person in charge" of an animal are responsible for meeting the legal obligations for the welfare of animals under their care.

For companion cats, the owner of the animals may place them in the care of others who become the persons in charge, but this does not derogate from their responsibility to ensure that the requirements of the Act are met.

Why is this important?

Failure to meet a minimum standard in this Code may be used as evidence to support a prosecution for an offence under the Act. A person who is charged with an offence against the Act can defend him or herself by showing that he or she has equalled or exceeded the minimum standards in this Code.

This Code includes information and example indicators for each minimum standard. The list of indicators is not exhaustive but is given to provide guidance on ways in which a minimum standard may be met.

Owners and persons in charge of animals are not required to comply with the recommendations for best practice in this Code, but are encouraged to do so to provide higher standards of welfare.

Legislative background

This Code does not provide an exhaustive list of the Act's requirements, and owners and those in charge of animals should note that they must comply with the minimum standards in this Code and in the general provisions of the Act. A copy of the Act is accessible at: www.legislation.govt.nz.

Other information

Other codes of welfare should be consulted where appropriate (see www.mpi.govt.nz).

Codes of welfare must be accompanied by a report that sets out the deliberations that the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) undertook when developing the codes of welfare including the standards and recommendations for best practice, the nature of any significant differences of opinion during drafting and consultation, and any matters that should be dealt with by regulation. Code reports can be accessed online (see www.mpi.govt.nz).

Although efforts to include relevant regulations within this Code have been made, there may be other regulations which are relevant to you. The full list of all animal welfare regulations should be consulted where appropriate (see www.legislation.govt.nz).

Part 1: General Requirements

1.1 Application

This Code of Welfare applies to all persons responsible for the welfare of companion cats, including cats in breeding establishments, boarding catteries, animal welfare shelters and pet shops. There is a separate section (Stray Cats and Cats Living in Colonies) providing information on stray cats (i.e. lost or abandoned companion cats) and cats living in colonies.

Feral cats are not included under the provisions of this Code. Feral cats may be defined as pests under the Biosecurity Act 1993 and therefore may be subject to control under a pest management strategy.

1.2 Interpretation and Definitions

Refer to Schedule I – Interpretation and Definitions.

Part 2: Adopting/Purchasing a Cat

Introduction

When adopting a cat from an animal welfare shelter, or purchasing a cat from a breeder or pet shop, the new owner should be provided with printed information detailing recommended procedures for settling the cat into its new environment and for its ongoing care. Details of the cat's vaccinations, flea and worming treatments should also be provided.

When introducing a cat into a home environment, the new owner should be familiar with the responsibilities of ownership and be prepared to undertake those responsibilities for the life of the cat.

Recommended Best Practice

- a) Kittens should be kept indoors after adoption/purchase until their course of vaccinations has been completed.
- b) Cats should be kept indoors after adoption/purchase, until it is clear that they are comfortable with their surroundings.
- c) Parents/guardians/teachers should teach young children in their care how to properly handle a cat, so that both cat and child are secure and not harmed.
- d) The cat's previous diet should be continued initially, as a change of diet can result in stomach upsets. Any change in the diet should be introduced gradually.

General Information

Cats and kittens are naturally both curious and cautious. They will want to investigate new surroundings, but may be fearful of new sights and smells. If possible, set aside a quiet room, with windows and doors closed, and allow the cat or kitten to emerge from its carry cage in its own time. Provide a carton or box lined with a soft fabric (such as a blanket), some food, water and a litter tray.

Cats will also be stressed when moving house. They need to be introduced to their new surroundings with care, and kept indoors until they appear to be settled. This may take several days or even weeks. Introduce them to the outdoors gradually, under supervision at first, and not at night. Be mindful of hazards such as neighbourhood dogs and traffic on busy roads. Ensure that when they are first allowed outside it is before, not after, a mealtime.

Cats need to become accustomed to where they eat and toilet. Cats are territorial and new cats will possibly be entering a territory of another cat or a dog. This can result in fighting, with kittens particularly at risk of injury. If early problems of confrontation occur, it is best to keep the new cat separated from the existing animal or animals for a period of time until they become more compatible.

On the rare occasions when cats fail to settle into a new environment, the use of sedatives may be appropriate and veterinary advice should be sought.

Part 3: Food and Water

3.1 Food and Feeding

Introduction

Cats should receive a daily diet in adequate quantities, and containing adequate nutrients, to meet their requirements for good health and welfare. Cats are obligate carnivores, which means that they need a meat-based diet. A cat's food requirements are not met either by a vegetarian diet or by fresh lean meat alone.

When considering the amount of food and nutrients cats require, a number of factors need to be taken into account:

- physiological state (e.g. pregnancy, lactation)
- nutritional composition of food
- age
- sex
- size
- state of health
- quality of diet
- growth rate
- previous feeding levels
- feeding frequency
- genetic effects of breed
- level of activity and exercise
- maximum periods of food deprivation (e.g. during transportation)
- introduction of new food.

Given the considerable variation that occurs between individual cats, food and nutrient requirements also vary. Therefore, it is not appropriate to specify as minimum standards a complete range of the quantities of food and nutrients required.

Most commercially prepared foods will recommend feeding quantity and frequency for the age or the physiological state (e.g. pregnancy) of the cat on their packaging.

Ideally, the food provided should be either a high-quality, complete and balanced commercial product or a mixture of food sources that together provide all the nutrients required for a healthy cat.

Some low-cost brands of cat food, including pet rolls, do not contain all the elements required to maintain good health. Labels should be checked for wording such as "fully balanced" or "complete".

Home-made diets may not contain all the nutrients a cat needs. Dog food should not be fed to cats as a sole maintenance diet, as it does not contain all the essential requirements to fulfil a cat's nutritional needs.

Some cats enjoy raw or cooked meat, offal, fish and milk, but these should be fed only as part of a balanced diet. Cats (especially kittens) may have difficulty digesting milk, resulting in diarrhoea or vomiting.

Some foods can have serious health implications (see 6.1.1: Diseases Related to Diet).

Minimum Standard No. 1 – Food and Feeding

- (a) Kittens that have been weaned must be fed a minimum of twice a day.
- (b) Cats over the age of 6 months must be fed at least once a day.
- (c) Cats must receive adequate quantities of food and nutrients to enable each cat to:
 - i) maintain good health; and
 - ii) meet its physiological demands, including those resulting from pregnancy, lactation, growth, exercise and exposure to cold; and
 - iii) avoid metabolic and nutritional disorders.

Recommended Best Practice

- a) Kittens that have been weaned should be fed small quantities at regular intervals throughout the day.
- b) Cats over the age of 6 months should be fed twice a day.
- c) Cats should be fed a complete meat-based cat food diet.
- d) A diet appropriate to the particular life stage should be fed.
- e) Prescription diets for certain medical conditions should be fed as instructed by a veterinarian.

General Information

Kittens should be provided with ready access to moist kitten food from the age of 3 – 4 weeks.

Uneaten moist food will quickly spoil and attract flies, vermin and other animals, and should be disposed of or refrigerated, as soon as the cat has eaten what it requires. Dry food made available for the cat to nibble throughout the day may not spoil, but owners should be aware that left-over food may attract other animals. Food should be stored appropriately, with dry food in a rodent-proof container and moist food (i.e. meat and opened cans) in a refrigerator.

Where disease is present in a cat, special attention to diet may be required. The cat's appetite may be suppressed, leading to a possibly inadequate supply of essential nutrients, even over a short period of time.

Dental problems may arise where soft food is the predominant diet. Feeding larger-sized cat biscuits or meat requiring chewing can help maintain healthy teeth.

If there is any doubt concerning an appropriate feeding regime for cats, advice should be sought from a person experienced in the management and feeding of cats, such as a veterinarian.

3.2 Body Condition

Introduction

An adult cat should be well proportioned and have an observable waist behind the ribs when viewed from above and from the side. Ribs should be palpable (able to be touched or felt), but with a light fat covering. The abdominal fat pad should be minimal; excessive fat here indicates obesity, which can contribute to disease.

A body condition score chart is provided in Schedule II – Assessment of Body Condition of Cats.

Minimum Standard No. 2 – Body Condition

- (a) When a cat's body condition score is "thin" as defined in Schedule II – Assessment of Body Condition of Cats, remedial action through veterinary attention or improved nutrition must be taken.

(b) A cat's body condition score must not be allowed to fall below "thin" as defined in Schedule II – Assessment of Body Condition of Cats.

Recommended Best Practice

A cat's body condition score should be maintained at "ideal" as defined in Schedule II – Assessment of Body Condition of Cats.

General Information

Some, but not all, cats will regulate their food intake to meet their energy needs. For those with a body condition score that exceeds "ideal" (i.e. "heavy" or "grossly obese"), a calorie-restricted diet should be considered.

The energy requirements for growth reduce as a kitten ages, but during the period of rapid growth (its first 3 months) a kitten will have 1.5 – 2.5 times the energy needs of a normally active adult cat.

A lactating queen will have 2 – 3 times the energy needs of a normally active adult cat.

3.3 Water

Introduction

Water is an essential daily requirement for the proper functioning of the whole body, and accordingly a bowl of water should be available at all times.

Minimum Standard No. 3 - Water

Cats must have continuous access to water that is palatable and not harmful to health.

General Information

The water intake of cats will vary among individuals. While all cats must be provided with access to water daily, requirements will be modified by the water content of the food provided. Cats eating dry food will require more water than those eating canned food or pet rolls. Despite many cats having a fondness for milk, milk should not be the sole source of fluid.

It should be noted that dehydration can become a serious problem for cats (especially kittens) when diarrhoea or other conditions occur that cause excessive fluid loss from the body. Equally, if an increase in thirst occurs, this may indicate that kidney damage or a disease such as diabetes has occurred, in which case veterinary attention should be sought.

Part 4: Housing and Hygiene

4.1 Housing

4.1.1 House Cats

Introduction

Cats usually prefer to have unrestricted access to the house. Cats will often find their own special place to rest and sleep within the house, and owners may assist the cat by providing a form of bedding such as a basket or rug. Some cats, however, are content to spend most of their time outdoors, and will seek out shelter under houses, in garden sheds, in dense undergrowth, etc.

In all situations, the cat needs to have access to adequate shelter to meet its physical needs. When the owner is absent from the house, the comfort and security of the cat therefore needs to be taken into account.

Recommended Best Practice

- a) Cats at risk of injury from traffic, dog attacks or cat fights should be kept indoors between dusk and dawn.
- b) Cats should be kept indoors when fireworks are in use.
- c) A scratching post or pad should be provided to meet cats' needs to maintain their claws.

General Information

Cats (especially kittens) are curious about their surroundings, and tend to seek out warmth. Owners should, as far as is practical, protect their cat from potentially dangerous household appliances (such as heaters, clothes dryers and washing machines), and also from access to potentially poisonous substances (such as rodent bait). They should also be aware that cats may investigate cupboards, sheds and garages and become inadvertently shut in.

4.1.2 Caged Cats (Other Than for Transport)

Introduction

In situations of confinement (other than for transport – see Part 9: Transportation), attention needs to be paid to the placement of cages and congestion within cages, as these factors can influence the potential for disease and the welfare of the cats. Cages should be constructed of solid, non-absorbable materials and be secure.

Cats need sleeping quarters that are comfortable and have suitable washable bedding.

Housing for queens with unweaned litters should be in a quiet location.

Information on appropriate design of cages may be obtained from breed societies, veterinarians, an animal welfare organisation specialising in the care of companion animals, and other codes of welfare.

Minimum Standard No. 4 – Caged Cats (Other Than for Transport)
(a) Caged cats must have sufficient room to enable them to stretch and move around freely, and must be provided with appropriate areas for feeding and toileting.
(b) Caged cats must be provided with the opportunity to engage in play and exercise daily.

Recommended Best Practice

- a) Caged cats should have access to climbing ramps, platforms, sleeping shelves and scratching posts or pads.
- b) Caged cats should have daily access to sunlight (when available).
- c) Caging areas should be adequately ventilated for the control of dampness and noxious odours and to minimise the airborne spread of infectious diseases such as viral respiratory diseases.

General Information

While cats may appear to spend a large amount of time sleeping, exercise is important for the health and well-being of the cat. Feline lower urinary tract disease has been associated with, among other things, reduced exercising in particular individuals.

Additional and specific information is to be found in the Code of Welfare: Temporary Housing of Companion Animals.

4.2 Hygiene

Introduction

Food and water bowls should be kept clean through regular washing.

In situations of limited or restricted access to the outdoors, a litter tray is required. Litter trays should be checked daily, and litter cleared of wastes and replenished or changed as required.

Toxoplasmosis poses a potential risk to pregnant woman in particular, and can be contracted through contact with cats' faeces. Care, such as the wearing of gloves, should therefore be taken when attending to litter.

Minimum Standard No. 5 - Hygiene
<ol style="list-style-type: none">(a) Food and water bowls must be washed regularly to prevent contamination that may pose a threat to the health and welfare of the cat.(b) Cats kept indoors, and caged cats, must have access to a litter tray containing absorbent material.(c) Litter trays must be attended to regularly, with faeces and moisture-laden litter removed, to prevent contamination that may pose a threat to the health and welfare of the cat.

Recommended Best Practice

- a) Food and water bowls should be washed daily.
- b) One deep litter tray for each indoor cat should be provided.
- c) The litter material should be discarded every few days from a litter tray, and the tray cleaned and disinfected.

General Information

Where a number of cats are confined together, care needs to be taken to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. The incidence of disease can be kept to a minimum if cleanliness and disinfection are complete and thorough.

Food and water bowls should be washed daily. They should be rinsed and dried in a manner that will not spread infectious diseases, e.g. air-drying or with a disposable paper towel. Litter trays should be checked daily, and also washed and dried as above if required. Used litter should be buried deeply, or bagged and sealed for rubbish disposal, in accordance with local by-laws.

Once a week, food and water bowls and litter trays should be washed in hot, soapy water; disinfected, ideally using diluted household bleach, for 5 – 10 minutes; and thoroughly rinsed and dried, particularly where cross-infection is an issue. Cats are sensitive to many chemicals, and great care needs to be exercised in achieving disinfection without introducing toxic substances into the cat's environment.

All hard surfaces with which caged cats come into contact should be scrubbed at least once a week with hot, soapy water and rinsed. Soap or detergent is required to remove organic matter that adheres to surfaces; heavily used areas can then be disinfected using dilute bleach and allowed to become thoroughly dry before cats re-enter. Bedding should be removed and washed weekly.

Soft furnishings and carpets should be avoided or kept to a minimum in cages, as they may harbour infectious agents.

Litter trays should be of adequate size and depth to allow a cat to dig and to squat comfortably. Suitable material for litter includes commercial cat litter, waste soda lime crystals, sand, shredded paper and untreated sawdust.

Care should be taken to clean around food bowls daily to remove small pieces of discarded food that may harbour saliva and infectious agents.

Part 5: Breeding

5.1 Need for Desexing

Introduction

Unplanned breeding of cats is not recommended because of the potential to add to the unwanted cat population. To prevent unplanned breeding, cats should be desexed.

The reproductive potential of a single female cat is estimated at 300 kittens in her reproductive lifetime. The potential for a male cat is far beyond that. Responsible cat ownership includes having cats desexed at or before puberty. There is no health or welfare advantage for female cats to have a litter before being desexed.

Recommended Best Practice

- a) Cats, other than those kept by a registered breeder for breeding purposes, should be desexed at or before puberty.
- b) Cats sold from a pet shop or rehomed from an animal welfare shelter should be desexed before sale/adoption.
- c) Veterinarians, pet shops, cat breeders, local councils and animal welfare organisations should continually encourage the desexing of cats in the community.

General Information

A cat may reach puberty any time after 4 months of age, and usually between 5 and 7 months of age. Desexing can safely be carried out before the onset of puberty. Early desexing does not adversely affect the physiological or behavioural development in cats. It should be noted that desexing, especially at an earlier age, will reduce the likelihood of some cat behaviours to which humans may object (such as spraying, straying and vocalising).

5.2 Mating Pregnancy, Birthing and Lactation

Introduction

For breeders of cats, consideration needs to be given to the frequency at which individual cats are used for breeding and the age at which breeding commences. Age of maturity varies with the breed and the individual cat, and breeders should ensure that the cat is adult and well grown before it is used for breeding.

The availability of new homes for kittens which result from breeding should also be taken into account before breeding.

Recommended Best Practice

- a) Only cats in good health and physical condition and with favourable temperament should be used for breeding. At all times, the health and welfare of the cat should be paramount.
- b) Queens should be a minimum of 9 months of age before breeding.
- c) Studs should be confined so as to prevent any indiscriminate breeding with queens.
- d) Breeding should only take place after it has been ascertained that there are suitable homes available for the kittens.
- e) Prior to the queen giving birth, a suitable box for the birthing should be provided in a safe and quiet environment.

General Information

The length of gestation in the cat is 61 – 65 days.

A nesting box should be provided for the queen before birthing, and the bedding material should be replaced after the birth has taken place. Given the opportunity, queens will frequently move their kittens to a new place at about 10 days of age. It should be ensured that the chosen place is warm, dry and safe.

In the later stages of pregnancy, and during lactation, the queen should be fed a complete and balanced diet that meets the nutritional demands of pregnancy/lactation.

While she is feeding the kittens, the queen needs to have access to clean, fresh water at all times.

Where birthing is occurring within the house, kittens should be restricted, for their safety, by keeping them within a pen enclosure for the first several weeks of their life.

Studs should be excluded from access to the kittens to prevent the kittens from being harmed or killed.

5.3 Removal of Kittens from the Queen

Introduction

Kittens' eyes will not normally open until 7 – 12 days after birth.

The queen will usually begin restricting access to herself at 4 – 5 weeks and weaning is usually completed by 8 weeks (i.e. the kitten is able to feed entirely on food provided by the owner). To ensure adequate socialisation to other cats, kittens ideally should not be removed from their mothers before 10 weeks of age, and preferably 12 weeks.

Sufficient, but not excessive, handling of young kittens from the age of 3 weeks will help them to socialise to people and later adjust to a new home. The essential age for socialisation of kittens is from 3 – 8 weeks of age, and handling during this period is vital for good sociability towards humans in the adult cat.

Minimum Standard No. 6 – Removal of Kittens from the Queen
Kittens made available for sale or rehoming requiring removal from the queen must be in good health and must be at least 8 weeks of age, except where they have been orphaned and cannot be fostered to another queen or where early removal from the queen is deemed necessary by a veterinarian.

Recommended Best Practice

Kittens should be at least 10 weeks old when removed from the queen.

5.4 Moving Kittens to a New Home

Rehoming is a stressful time for young kittens. Owners of kittens to be rehomed need to be sure that the kittens are capable of independent life before moving them to new homes. A vaccination/worming programme should be implemented before rehoming (see Recommended Best Practice in Section 6.1: Signs of Ill Health).

When kittens are relocated, it is most desirable that new owners are provided with educational material concerning care, welfare and the consequences of not desexing the kittens.

Part 6: Health

6.1 Signs of Ill Health

Introduction

Health and welfare are closely associated, and owners have a responsibility to, as far as possible, prevent ill health in their cats and to treat it where it occurs. The health and welfare of the cat should be checked regularly, including observing whether the cat is eating, cleaning and behaving normally.

The signs of ill health may include (but are not limited to):

- abnormal dullness or lethargy, abnormal agitation/excitement, or fitting (seizures)
- an increase or a decrease in thirst and/or appetite
- vomiting and/or diarrhoea
- persistent bleeding from an orifice (e.g. mouth, nose or anus)
- bleeding that continues for more than 2 minutes from a skin wound
- straining to pass urine or faeces
- persistent sneezing, persistent coughing or persistent abnormal breathing
- lameness, unsteady gait or inability to stand or walk
- significant weight loss or weight gain, or change in girth of the cat
- swellings
- paleness of gums
- failure to groom
- persistent scratching or biting of skin, or persistent shaking of the head
- areas of hairlessness
- unusual smell from ears or mouth
- weeping and/or inflamed eyes
- discharge from nose
- encrustations on ears or nose
- abnormal posture
- disorientation.

It should be noted that the presence of purring is not necessarily an indicator of good health.

Minimum Standard No. 7 – Signs of Ill Health

- (a) Cats which are observed by their owners or persons in charge to be showing:
- i) signs of significant pain, suffering and distress; or
 - ii) signs of repeated straining over a continuous period of 30 minutes, as if to pass urine or faeces; or
 - iii) signs of rapidly deteriorating health
- must URGENTLY receive veterinary attention, be brought to the attention of an inspector under the Act (e.g. an SPCA inspector) or be humanely euthanased.
- (b) Cats which are observed by their owners or persons in charge to be showing:
- i) signs of chronic pain, suffering and distress; or
 - ii) signs of deteriorating health
- must receive veterinary attention, be brought to the attention of an inspector under the Act (e.g. an SPCA inspector) or be humanely euthanased.

Recommended Best Practice

- a) Cats which are observed by their owners or persons in charge to be showing signs of ill health should receive appropriate veterinary attention.
- b) Cats should have an annual health check conducted by a veterinarian.
- c) Kittens should receive a course of vaccinations from the age of 8 weeks. All cats should be vaccinated according to veterinary recommendations.
- d) Kittens should be wormed every 2 weeks, starting at 3 - 4 weeks of age and continuing to 3 months of age. Cats over 3 months of age should be wormed every 3 months.
- e) Light-coloured cats should be protected from the threat of skin cancer with the regular application on nose and ears of appropriate animal sunscreen, especially during summer.

General Information

It is normal for a cat to vomit to empty its stomach of indigestible contents such as the feathers of birds, grass or fur swallowed during grooming. It is of concern only if vomiting continues over the following 24 - 48 hours, or where there are other signs of ill health such as the cat not eating or drinking normally, in which case veterinary attention should be sought.

The following is a summary of diseases that may result in ill health for cats.

Diseases Related to Diet

- vomiting and diarrhoea associated with food sensitivities
- mouth infections associated with the build-up of tartar on teeth and consequential damage to kidneys
- vitamin B1 (thiamine) deficiency
- excess vitamin A from diets high in liver
- diseases of the lower urinary tract that may be associated with inadequate water intake, lack of exercise, obesity and stress.

Contagious Diseases

There are a number of infectious diseases than can be avoided by vaccination. If a cat becomes infected, early veterinary attention is imperative.

Parasitic Diseases

Internal parasites such as roundworms and external parasites such as fleas, mites and lice can be a significant cause of distress and ill health. Effective treatments and preventive programmes are available.

Skin Diseases

There are a number of skin diseases that can cause distress. Veterinary diagnosis is usually needed to ensure correct treatment.

6.1.1 Diseases Related to Diet

A number of specific diseases in cats are caused through inappropriate diet. Even when an owner is feeding a nutritionally balanced diet, food sensitivity diseases can occur that result in skin disease (especially scratching or dermatitis) or in vomiting and diarrhoea. Veterinary advice and investigation are usually needed to diagnose and treat the cat.

Cats should be regularly monitored for the appearance of mouth infections, and if present veterinary advice should be sought. Mouth infections produce toxins that enter the bloodstream, resulting in damage to the cat's

kidneys, with possibly fatal results. Signs of mouth infection may be the appearance of bad breath or a sudden weight loss and an increase in a cat's thirst.

Cats are particularly susceptible to a lack of vitamin B1 (thiamine). This may be caused through the feeding of dog food, of a cat food that is not complete and balanced or of raw fish, or may be secondary to loss of appetite for several days as a result of some other condition.

The feeding of a diet very high in liver can result, over time, in vitamin A toxicity. This may cause severe mobility problems through fusion of the vertebrae.

Cats which do not drink very much may be more susceptible to developing feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD) or inflammation of the bladder and urethra. In male cats, this may progress to urethral blockage, which will rapidly lead to death if not treated. Other factors associated with FLUTD include obesity, stress and lack of exercise. FLUTD represents a group of diseases, and veterinary investigation is required to ascertain the cause in an individual cat.

6.1.2 Contagious Diseases

Cats are most commonly vaccinated against a number of diseases such as cat flu (feline panleukopaemia) and snuffles (feline rhinotracheitis and feline calicivirus). Vaccines are also available against feline leukaemia, feline Aids and chlamydia, and their use should be discussed with a veterinarian.

Vaccination is an important means of controlling infectious diseases, such as those referred to above, in cats. High-risk situations include boarding catteries, cat shows, multi-cat households, and neighbourhoods with a dense cat population and/or a stray cat population. Veterinary advice needs to be sought regarding the most appropriate vaccination programme, as requirements vary depending on the disease and the age of the cat. Kittens are particularly susceptible to contagious diseases.

6.1.3 Parasitic Diseases

Both internal and external feline parasites depend on the cat for part of their life cycle. In small numbers they may cause minimal disturbance to the cat, but if their numbers increase they may cause significant discomfort. A high parasite load may compromise the welfare of the cat. Individual cats may also develop hypersensitivity to parasites and show extreme irritation, even with a very low parasite burden.

External parasites that live on the skin of cats include fleas, mites and lice. Fleas and lice are common, especially in warmer areas. Their presence may be indicated by excessive grooming, scratching, fur loss, scabs or scale. Fleas or flea dirt (black coils that turn red when moistened with water) may also be seen in the coat. Specific treatment from a veterinarian is recommended if signs of irritation from fleas or lice are detected.

The ears of cats, especially young cats, should be checked regularly for evidence of ear mites. An infestation may cause excessive scratching of the ears and a dark-brown discharge inside the ears.

Internal parasites, such as intestinal worms or lungworms, are common and require regular monitoring and treatment. These parasites are particularly prevalent in young cats or kittens. Loss of body weight plus a tendency to a prominent belly, dry coat and regular licking at the anus are signs that may indicate the presence of roundworms. Since queens can transmit roundworms via their milk, all kittens should be regularly wormed with an effective roundworm treatment (see Recommended Best Practice in Section 6.1: Signs of Ill Health).

Although lungworms are less common than roundworms they can nevertheless cause serious ill health in affected kittens. A wet, unproductive cough, which may be mistaken for an unproductive vomiting bout, can indicate the presence of lungworms in kittens. If this is suspected, veterinary attention should be sought immediately.

6.1.4 Skin Diseases

Skin diseases may cause considerable stress and distress to the cat. Dermatitis and eczema are common problems in the cat, and there are many causes including allergies, parasitic diseases, infections, nutritional imbalances and hormonal disorders. As few of these conditions are resolved without appropriate treatment, veterinary advice should be sought so that stress to the cat may be minimised.

Ringworm is a fungal disease to which young cats are particularly susceptible. The fungus does not cause the cat any discomfort and is not associated with scratching or licking at affected areas. Usually, the first sign of infection in the cat is the appearance of small circular bald areas that may appear on any part of the body including the head. However, since the fungus is infectious to humans (particularly children), the first sign may be the appearance of the disease in the owner's family. Effective oral treatment of cats is available through veterinarians.

Cancer can occur in many forms in cats but the most common form occurs in cats with white ears or noses. Ultraviolet radiation from the sun can cause the skin on the edge of the ears or nose to ulcerate and slowly erode away. If left too long this form of cancer can become untreatable, so early detection and treatment is advised.

Abscesses are a frequent result of wounds caused by fighting that become infected. Such abscesses are very painful and may also result in the spread of potentially life-threatening infection through the body. Home treatment of abscesses is not recommended, and veterinary assistance should be sought.

6.2 Care of Claws and Coat

Introduction

Cats are fastidious groomers and, in general, will take good care of their coat. Short-haired cats usually keep their coats in good condition through self-grooming. Long-haired cats should be regularly groomed to remove excess fur. Failure of a cat to groom is often a sign of ill health (see Section 6.1: Signs of Ill Health).

Recommended Best Practice

- a) Claws should be trimmed if overgrown.
- b) Long-haired cats should be groomed daily to prevent mats forming in the coat.

General Information

The claws of older and indoor cats, especially, may become overgrown. Such claws should be trimmed carefully, while avoiding damage to the quick which will result in pain and bleeding.

Declawing of cats is a restricted surgical procedure under the Act, and therefore can only be carried out by a veterinarian or a veterinary student under the direct supervision of a veterinarian. The declawing of cats to alleviate social or behavioural problems should be contemplated only when retraining has proved ineffective and euthanasia is the only alternative.

Severe matting of the coat in long-haired cats results in discomfort for the cat, as the skin beneath the mats may become irritated and inflamed. Mats may provide hiding places for fleas and lice, causing even greater irritation as the cat is not able to groom the parasite out. It is difficult for owners to remove mats, as they may form very close to the skin and attempts to cut them out may result in accidental cutting of the cat's skin. For this reason, it is generally recommended that a veterinarian perform dematting under general anaesthesia or sedation.

6.3 Care of Older Cats

Introduction

Older cats (over 8 years) may require extra care and attention. Some diseases occurring in older cats may be interpreted by the owner as part of the natural ageing process. Owners are not always aware that some changes they associate with age are related to specific diseases that may be managed by treatment and/or appropriate nutrition.

Recommended Best Practice

- a) Cats over the age of 8 years should receive a veterinary check 6-monthly.
- b) Special attention should be given to providing an appropriate diet for the age and health of the older cat.

General Information

Older cats may benefit from specially formulated diets.

Kidney disease, oral disease, diabetes, hyperthyroidism, heart disease, cancer and arthritis are some of the serious diseases that can occur in older cats. Weight loss, excessive drinking or urination, increased or decreased appetite and increased or decreased activity may be seen with these conditions. In such cases, veterinary advice should be sought to determine specific treatment that may be required.

A 6-monthly veterinary check may appear frequent, but is equivalent to a person going to the doctor approximately once every 3 – 4 years.

6.4 Injured Cats

Introduction

Owners and those in charge of cats have a responsibility to, as far as possible, protect their cat from injury and, where injury has occurred, seek veterinary treatment.

Minimum Standard No. 8 – Injured Cats
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Cats which are observed by their owners or persons in charge to be significantly injured must receive urgent veterinary attention, be brought to the attention of an inspector under the Act (e.g. an SPCA inspector) or be humanely euthanased.
--

Recommended Best Practice

Cats of unknown ownership which are observed to be significantly injured should receive urgent veterinary attention or be brought to the attention of an inspector under the Act (e.g. an SPCA inspector).

General Information

Accidental injury to cats while they are crossing roads is common and there is a recognised moral obligation on the driver of a vehicle who injures any animal, including a cat, to stop and render assistance.

An injured cat may be in severe pain and may bite and scratch during attempts to handle it. The cat should be moved off the road using a blanket or similar device, and an attempt made to locate the owner. If the owner cannot be found within a short period of time, the injured cat should be brought to the attention of a

veterinarian or an inspector under the Act (e.g. an SPCA inspector). A severely injured cat in pain should not be left at the roadside.

6.5 Use of Collars

Introduction

The use of collars on cats can serve a number of functions. Good-quality flea collars reduce the flea population but do not provide complete flea control, particularly for cats with an allergy to fleas. Collars are a useful way to identify cats, if a disc showing the owner's name and contact details is attached to the collar. Magnetic collars, in combination with electromagnetic cat doors, are helpful to restrict access of individual cats to a premises.

See summary of regulations appended to this Code:

- Regulation 47 – Collars and Tethers.

Minimum Standard No. 9 – Use of Collars
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Collars, where used, must be fitted to the cat in such a way that the risk of injury to the cat is avoided.

Recommended Best Practice

Only collars that are elasticised or provide a quick-release mechanism should be used.

General Information

It is important that the collar is sufficiently snug around the cat's neck to reduce the possibility of it catching on objects such as vegetation. Collars that are too loose around the neck can be a hazard, as the cat may get a front leg or its lower jaw caught through the collar, with possibly severe consequences. As a guide, two fingers should be able to fit snugly between the collar and the cat's neck.

Part 7: Behaviour Problems

Introduction

Some behaviours that were natural and life-preserving in the cat as a wild species may be seen as “problems” by humans, when performed inappropriately by the cat on the owner’s property. Examples are those behaviours associated with the marking or identifying of the cat’s own territory, such as the clawing of furniture and urine spraying. Since these are instinctive to the species, it is not always possible to eliminate such behaviours once they are established. Animal behaviourists and veterinarians may be able to suggest procedures for retraining. Sometimes, medication may modify a behaviour.

Recommended Best Practice

- a) Advice should be sought at the early stages of a behaviour problem.
- b) Cats should not be punished by physical means for toileting in inappropriate places.
- c) Cats kept indoors should be provided with a scratching post or pad.

General Information

Aggressive and/or irritable behaviour may also have a medical basis, be age-related or be due to inappropriate handling. Physical punishment of kittens (e.g. as a means of toilet training) may result in the development of either excessive timidity or aggression in the cat.

Inappropriate urination and defecation may also indicate a medical problem, or may be associated with a cat in a multi-cat household, insufficient changing of the cat litter or difficulty of access to the outdoors.

Cats are extremely territorial. The sudden appearance of inappropriate toilet behaviour, aggressiveness or other unacceptable behavioural problems may indicate that a more dominant cat, especially a tomcat, has taken over part or all of a cat’s territory. Advice from a person who is an expert in cat behaviour should be sought when such sudden behavioural changes occur.

Cats are adapted for a nocturnal lifestyle, and many of the sexually-related behaviours are expressed at night. Such problems as caterwauling, fighting and territorial disputes may lead to car accidents or other untoward events. For this reason it is advised that where there is a dense population of cats, such as in urban environments, cats are trained to become accustomed from an early age to being kept indoors at night.

Part 8: Methods of Identification

Introduction

It is strongly recommended that cats are able to be accurately identified in case of loss, or being held in boarding accommodation. Cats are likely to spend some of their time outside of their owner's legal property boundary. For the purposes of control, it is necessary to be able to identify whether a cat has an owner or not. Methods of identification include the wearing of a collar and tag, tattooing or microchipping.

Recommended Best Practice

Cats should be identified with a microchip.

General Information

Collars that are not fitted properly can result in injury to cats. See Section 6.5: Use of Collars and summary of regulations appended to this Code Regulation 47 – Collars and Tethers.

Part 9: Transportation

Introduction

At times, cats may need to be transported by owners in their vehicles. Adult cats may show varying degrees of anxiety when confined in a cat-carry container and transported in a vehicle. To ensure the safety of both the cat and the occupants of the vehicle, and perhaps occupants of other vehicles, cats must be securely contained while being transported in a vehicle.

Minimum Standard No. 10 - Transportation

- (a) While being transported in a vehicle, cats must be carried in a secure container.
- (b) Cats being transported must have sufficient space within the container to stand, turn around and rest normally.
- (c) There must be adequate provision for ventilation in the form of multiple holes on at least three sides of the container.
- (d) The interior of the container must be smooth, with no projections that could cause injury to the cat.
- (e) Cats must not be left unattended in a vehicle when heat is likely to cause distress to the cat.

Recommended Best Practice

Cat-carry containers, bedding such as a blanket, and dry food and water supply should be on hand to enable evacuation of cats during an emergency.

General Information

Cat-carry containers are most suitably constructed from fibreglass, metal, rigid plastic, weld metal mesh, solid wood or plywood. Cardboard carry boxes have a limited life and are suitable for short journeys only. A cloth covering the container (provided it does not impede ventilation) may help some cats to travel with less stress.

Care needs to be taken when transporting cats by car. The temperature in a closed vehicle in full sun can reach 50 degrees Celsius in less than half an hour. In a closed container, the temperature of the enclosed cat will rise rapidly, which will produce extreme distress and death.

Kittens which are carried by car, and continue to be transported at regular intervals, will, in general, develop a higher tolerance for travel than cats not introduced to cars at an early age.

Cats being transported over long distances, either by road or by air, have additional requirements such as appropriate ventilation, and provision of water. Where cats are to be transported over long distances, it is recommended that advice is sought from a veterinarian.

Cats awaiting loading onto aircraft should be kept in a secure, tranquil and quiet environment and should be sheltered from the elements.

Sedation of cats for transportation is not generally recommended.

A person wishing to export a cat from New Zealand to any country, including New Zealand dependencies, should first seek advice from the Ministry for Primary Industries or a licensed animal transport agent as to any requirements they must meet.

Part 10: Relinquishing Ownership

While ownership of a cat should be undertaken as a commitment for the entire life of that animal, some situations can occur where it may become necessary to relinquish ownership. Such situations could include relocation, including to rented accommodation where animals are not permitted, and changes in financial or family circumstances, including sickness or the death of the owner.

Care should be taken to ensure that the cat is either safely rehomed to a family member or friend who is prepared to undertake the commitment of ownership, or relinquished to an animal welfare shelter (such as the SPCA) for adoption to a new owner.

It is an offence under the Act to abandon a cat, and an obligation exists for the owner or person in charge to pass the cat into the care of a responsible person or animal welfare shelter (see section 14(2) of the Act).

Part 11: Euthanasia

Introduction

Euthanasia is the induction of a painless and rapid death. Cats should ideally be euthanased by a veterinarian, preferably by intravenous injection, using a registered drug for the purpose. Cats which are difficult to handle may need to be tranquillised first.

The Act provides for the euthanasia of a severely injured or sick cat by a veterinarian where in his or her opinion, the animal should be destroyed because reasonable treatment will not be sufficient to make the animal respond and the animal will suffer unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress if it continues to live. A veterinarian may euthanise the cat without the permission of the owner, where the owner cannot be found within a reasonable time or where the owner does not agree to the euthanasia but does not obtain a secondary opinion from a veterinarian within a reasonable time. A warranted inspector or auxiliary officer under the Act (e.g. an SPCA inspector or auxiliary officer) may also perform this task; however, it is preferable that euthanasia be performed by a veterinarian if immediately available.

It is inhumane to kill a cat by drowning. Kittens, in particular, have a “diving reflex” that prolongs their distress while drowning.

It is an offence under the Act to kill any animal such that it suffers unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress (see section 12(c) of the Act).

Minimum Standard No. 11 - Euthanasia
(a) When a cat is euthanased it must be carried out in such a way to ensure that death occurs quickly. (b) Cats (including kittens) must not be killed by drowning.

Recommended Best Practice

Cats should be euthanased by a veterinarian or, where they are clearly suffering extreme and unacceptable pain and a veterinarian is not immediately available, by a warranted inspector under the Act (e.g. an SPCA inspector).

Part 12: Stray Cats and Cats Living in Colonies

With New Zealand reputedly having one of the highest rates of cat ownership in the world, it is not surprising that there are a correspondingly high number of stray cats in the community. These cats may breed and, where they have no contact with humans, their offspring may revert to a wild state over time.

Stray cats may live singly or may join colonies, particularly in urban environments where there is shelter (abandoned buildings, dense undergrowth, etc) and a food source (rubbish tip, restaurant rubbish bins, etc). Given the numbers of cats living in New Zealand, such colonies will probably always exist.

Often single stray cats, and cats living in colonies, are provided with food on an ad hoc basis by sympathetic individuals. In some instances, colonies are managed on a more formal basis (see Managed Colonies below).

While a person who merely feeds cats in a colony is not the “person in charge” in terms of the Act, and therefore is not legally responsible for the cats in the colony, it should be noted that, where people trap cats in the colony in order to provide for their vaccination, desexing or care, they will have legal obligations as the “person in charge” (see “Trapping of Cats” below).

Managed Colonies

Some cat colonies in New Zealand are cared for by individuals under a management plan agreed with the landowner and/or the local council. Such a management plan should include means of identification; provision of food, water and access to shelter; a vaccination and parasite programme; provision of veterinary treatment; a desexing programme; and a long-term management strategy including continuity of care. Further information on management of cat colonies can be obtained from the SPCA.

Trapping of Cats

The Act (see section 36) provides that for any trapped cat, the following obligations apply:

- any traps set must be checked daily within 12 hours after sunrise, commencing from the day after the trap is first set; and
- any cats caught must be attended to without delay.

Where practicable, it is recommended when trapping stray cats and cats in colonies that traps be checked more frequently.

Any trapped cat must be provided with basic care to meet the requirements of the Act or be released if it is uninjured or be killed humanely if it is a feral cat. Any cat released back into a colony must be in sufficiently good health to be able to fend for itself, and have ongoing access to adequate food, water and shelter to meet its daily needs.

The Act (see section 141) provides that, where a stray cat is trapped and placed in the care of an approved organisation under the Act (such as the SPCA), that organisation must take reasonable steps to identify the owner of the cat, and may take steps to prevent or mitigate any suffering of the cat. If the owner of the cat cannot be identified then, after 7 days, the cat may be sold, found a new home or euthanased.

Schedule I – Interpretation and Definitions

Act

The Animal Welfare Act 1999.

animal

As defined in the Act:

- a) Means any live member of the animal kingdom that is –
 - i) A mammal; or
 - ii) A bird; or
 - iii) A reptile; or
 - iv) An amphibian; or
 - v) A fish (bony or cartilaginous); or
 - vi) Any octopus, squid, crab, lobster, or crayfish (including freshwater crayfish); or
 - vii) Any other member of the animal kingdom which is declared from time to time by the Governor-General, by Order in Council, to be an animal for the purposes of the Act; and
- b) Includes any mammalian foetus, or any avian or reptilian pre-hatched young, that is in the last half of its period of gestation or development; and
- c) Includes any marsupial pouch young; but
- d) Does not include –
 - i) A human being; or
 - ii) Except as provided in paragraph (b) or paragraph (c), any animal in the pre-natal, pre-hatched, larval, or other such developmental stage.”

colony

A group of stray cats living together.

companion cat

Common domestic cat (including a kitten unless otherwise stated) that lives with humans as a companion and is dependent on humans for its welfare. For the purposes of this Code, will be referred to as “cat”.

feral cat

For the purposes of this Code, means a cat which is not a stray cat and which has none of its needs provided by humans. Feral cats generally do not live around centres of human habitation. Feral cat population size fluctuates largely independently of humans, is self-sustaining and is not dependent on input from the companion cat population.

ill-treat

As defined in section 2 of the Act, “ill-treat”, in relation to an animal, means causing the animal to suffer, by any act or omission, pain or distress that in its kind or degree, or in its object, or in the circumstances in which it is inflicted, is unreasonable or unnecessary.

kitten

A cat less than 6 months of age.

owner

As defined in section 2 of the Act, “owner”, in relation to an animal, includes the parent or guardian of a person under the age of 16 years who –

- a) Owns the animal; and
- b) Is a member of the parent’s or guardian’s household living with and dependent on the parent or guardian.

person in charge

As defined in section 2 of the Act, “person in charge”, in relation to an animal, includes a person who has the animal in that person’s possession or custody, or under that person’s care, control, or supervision.

queen

A female cat that has not been desexed.

registered breeder

Registered as a breeder holding a current registered prefix with any of the recognised national cat organisations.

SPCA

Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

stray cat

For the purposes of this Code, means a companion cat which is lost or abandoned and which is living as an individual or in a group (colony). Stray cats have many of their needs indirectly supplied by humans, and live around centres of human habitation. Stray cats are likely to interbreed with the unneutered companion cat population.

stud

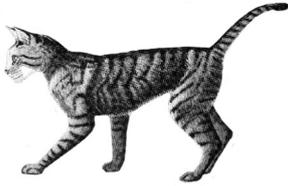
An entire male cat intended for breeding (sometimes referred to as a “tomcat”).

Schedule II – Assessment of Body Condition of Cats



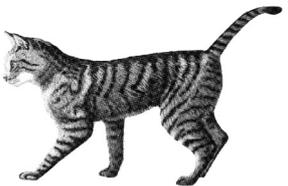
1. EMACIATED

Ribs visible on short-haired cats; no palpable fat; severe abdominal tuck; lumbar vertebrae and pelvis easily palpated.



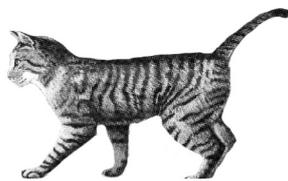
2. THIN

Ribs easily palpable, with minimal fat covering; backbone obvious; obvious waist behind ribs; minimal abdominal fat.



3. IDEAL

Well proportioned; observable waist behind ribs; ribs palpable, with slight fat covering; abdominal fat pad minimal.



4. HEAVY

Ribs not easily palpated, with moderate fat covering; waist poorly discernible; obvious rounding of abdomen; moderate abdominal fat pad.



5. GROSSLY OBESE

Ribs not palpable, under heavy fat cover; heavy fat deposits over lumbar area, face and limbs; distension of abdomen, with no waist; extensive abdominal fat deposits.



(Source: Purina Pet Care Centre)

Appendix of extracts from the Animal Welfare (Care and Procedures) Regulations 2018

Although efforts to include relevant regulations within this Code have been made, there may be other regulations which are relevant to you. The full list of all animal welfare regulations should be consulted where appropriate (see www.legislation.govt.nz).

3 Interpretation

In these regulations, unless the context otherwise requires,—

skin abrasion means an injury where the skin has started to scrape or rub away, but does not include (by itself) hair loss

tether means any form of restraint that secures any part of an animal to an object or the ground

47 Collars and tethers

- (1) The owner of, and every person in charge of, an animal must ensure that any collar or tether on the animal (whether on the neck or on any other part of the animal) does not—
 - a) cause a cut that bleeds or discharges; or
 - b) cause a skin abrasion that bleeds or discharges; or
 - c) cause a swelling; or
 - d) prevent the animal from breathing normally, panting, or drinking.
- (2) A person who fails to comply with this regulation commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding \$900.
- (3) The offence in subclause (2) is an infringement offence with an infringement fee of \$300.