



Feline Immunodeficiency Virus

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) is a virus that affects cats. It causes long-term suppression of the immune system. It is similar to HIV in humans and is often referred to as “kitty AIDS”. However, you cannot get the virus from your cat so humans are safe around cats with FIV.

The suppression of the immune system means an FIV positive cat is much more likely to have recurring infections. They are also five times more likely to develop lymphoma (cancer).

How FIV Spreads

Bite wounds are the primary means of transmission. Therefore, cats that go outdoors are at a higher risk since they are more likely to fight with other cats. Indoor cats living in a stable home environment with other cats that don't fight are at low risk.



Rarely mothers may pass it onto their kittens.

Signs

There are three phases of the disease. In the early stage, a cat may have fever, decreased appetite, enlarged lymph nodes, inflamed eyes, diarrhea, vomiting, or respiratory disease. This stage usually only lasts days to a few weeks and may go unnoticed.

The second stage tends to be the longest phase. In this stage, the body contains but does not eliminate the virus. The cat does not show signs of infection at this time. This stage can last for months to several years.

Eventually, an infected cat will enter the third and final stage of the disease. In this stage, the cat will develop infections or cancer with severe weight loss before succumbing to the infection.

Diagnosis

A FIV test is a blood test to screen for the virus. Cats will have additional tests to rule out other diseases that may cause similar signs.

Treatment

The goal of treatment is to prevent secondary infections that occur because of the suppressed immune system. Routine dental care is important since FIV positive cats are also more likely to develop dental disease. Supplements such as fish oil, antioxidants, and probiotics can help boost the immune system and keep an FIV cat healthier for longer.

Prognosis

FIV positive cats can live many years with an excellent quality of life with proper care. However, eventually, most cats will develop terminal disease associated with immune suppression.

Prevention

Test every kitten and any new cat coming into your household for FIV. Monitor any positive cats for secondary diseases.

A vaccine is available to prevent the disease but it's not reliable. Therefore, we don't advise vaccination as the best way to keep your cat healthy is to avoid the virus. Ideally keep all your cats indoors. Test all cats that go outdoors once a year to find the disease early.

If you have an FIV positive cat, keep him separated from FIV negative cats if any of the cats are aggressive and could bite. However, many cats have lived together peacefully for years. Since the disease is not transmitted through close living and grooming, if the cats do not fight, the risk of transmission is very low.

