



Feline Leukemia

Feline Leukemia (FeLV) is a life-threatening virus that affects cats. It suppresses the immune system and can cause malignant cancer. Other infections can occur due to the suppressed immune system.

How FeLV Spreads

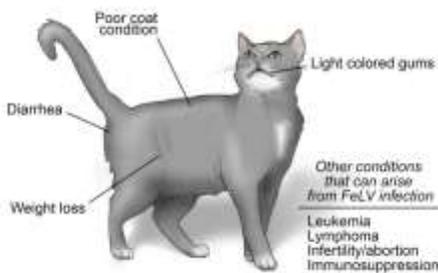
This virus spreads through the saliva, urine, and feces of infected cats. It's generally transmitted during play or grooming but bite wounds can also transmit it.



Mothers can infect their kittens. Kittens are more susceptible to infection than adult cats.

Cats that go outdoors (even for brief periods) are at a higher risk for contracting the disease. Once an infected cat comes indoors, they can spread the disease among cats in the household.

Signs



During the early stages, there are no signs. Over a few weeks or even a few years the cat may slowly deteriorate or have recurring bouts of illness.

Signs can include fever, decreased appetite, weight loss, poor coat, pale gums, diarrhea, and tiredness.

Usually, the cat or kitten is thin, weak, anemic (not enough red blood cells), has enlarged lymph nodes, and recurring infections. The cat can also develop cancer (lymphoma).

In kittens born with the disease, they have "fading kitten syndrome" and die within the first 2 weeks of life.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is with a blood test looking for the virus. Other tests such as a blood count, chemistries, urinalysis, and x-rays help to determine the severity of the disease.

Treatment

Sick cats will need supportive treatment such as assisted feeding and intravenous fluids. Antibiotics are often given, either to treat or prevent an infection and blood transfusions if a cat is severely anemic. Cats with cancer will need chemotherapy. Anti-viral medication is usually given.



Herbs and supplements to support the immune system may help, especially if a cat is not showing severe signs.

Prognosis

For healthy cats that have a FeLV positive test, the average survival time is 3 years. By closely monitoring an infected cat's health, it can have an excellent quality of life. For cats that are more severely infected, the prognosis is poor.

Prevention

Test all kittens for FeLV. Test new cats before introducing them into the household. Ideally keep all cats indoors. Otherwise, vaccinate any cat that goes outside.

