



Feline Infectious Peritonitis

Feline infectious peritonitis (FIP) is a serious, fatal viral disease. The virus causing it is feline coronavirus. Only 5-10% of infected cats actually develop FIP as the virus mutates. This can occur weeks to years after exposure to the coronavirus. The disease is most common in young cats under 2 years of age, or senior cats older than 10 years.

Transmission

Any cat with the corona virus is at risk for developing FIP. However, it is more common to occur in cats with weakened immune systems such as kittens, cats with feline leukemia virus (FeLV), and geriatric cats. The virus can be transmitted from cat to cat exposure or exposure of contaminated feces, but this does not occur often. Usually, infected mothers transmit the virus to their kittens.



Signs

There are two major forms of feline infectious peritonitis: “wet” form and “dry” form. The “dry” form of FIP causes chronic weight loss, decreased appetite, depression, anemia, and a persistent fever that does not respond to antibiotics. The cat will often show signs of damage to internal organs such as liver or kidney failure or neurological signs.

The “wet” form can have similar signs to the “dry” form initially. In the “wet” form, fluid accumulates in the abdomen, and (less often) in the chest. The abdomen

swells and the cat will appear pot-bellied. As the fluid presses up on the lungs, it may become difficult for the cat to breath.

Since cats hide signs of illness well, you may not notice anything until the cat is very sick. Once you see signs, they progress in severity over the course of days to weeks, ending in death.

Diagnosis

There is no reliable test for FIP. Since it can resemble other diseases in its early stages, blood and urine tests, x-rays, and an ultrasound will rule out other causes. If there is fluid in the abdomen, examining a sample of the fluid can help make a diagnosis.

Treatment

Unfortunately, there is no cure or even effective treatment for FIP. Treatment consists of supportive care to keep the cat comfortable. Supportive care includes assisted feeding, intravenous fluid therapy, draining abdominal fluid, and blood transfusions. Often, many people choose a humane euthanasia.

Prevention

To decrease the risk of feline infectious peritonitis, keep cats in multi-cat households as healthy as possible. Scoop litter boxes daily, clean regularly, and keep them away from food and water bowls. A vaccine is available for FIP though its effectiveness is questionable. We don't recommend vaccination.

