



Guide To Feline Leukemia and FIV

Feline leukemia (**FeLV**) and feline immunodeficiency virus (**FIV**) are major causes of deaths in cats. Both viruses are spread contagiously from cat to cat, and surveys show that up to 15 percent of sick cats are infected with one of the viruses. Neither disease is curable but can be treated and managed if the disease is caught early enough.

How the Viruses Are Spread:

FeLV is spread when the saliva or urine of an infected cat comes in contact with an uninfected cat. What this means is that if your cat goes outside and eats or licks a piece of grass that's been urinated on by an infected cat, he could become infected. However, this doesn't mean that only outdoor cats can be infected. Kittens born to infected mothers are commonly infected as well. If you have more than one cat in your household and one is infected, the virus can be transmitted by food and water bowls, litter boxes, or by grooming each other.

FIV is typically spread when one cat bites another (i.e. getting into a fight and bitten by an infected cat). Rarely does an infected mother infect her kittens. FIV, unlike FeLV, survives outside the body for only a few minutes and is unlikely to be passed by sharing litter boxes and food dishes.

What the Viruses Do:

FIV and FeLV affect cats in similar ways, primarily by interfering with the immune system's ability to ward off infections. Bacteria, viruses, protozoa and fungi found in the everyday environment — where they usually don't affect healthy cats — can cause severe illness in FIV and FeLV infected cats. Various kinds of cancer and blood diseases are much more common in cats infected with either virus as well. In some cats, signs of disease may not become apparent until weeks, months, or even years after they first become infected with FIV or FeLV.

Signs of Possible Infection:

- ⊙ Decreased appetite
- ⊙ Weight loss
- ⊙ Decreased grooming
- ⊙ Decreased energy
- ⊙ Weakness
- ⊙ Pale gums
- ⊙ Mouth sores
- ⊙ Diarrhea
- ⊙ Enlarged lymph nodes
- ⊙ Abscesses
- ⊙ Urinary problems
- ⊙ Cancer
- ⊙ Renal (kidney) problems
- ⊙ Respiratory conditions
- ⊙ Neurological disease

(As you can see, almost every symptom you can think of is listed, so your cat should be tested every time he's sick!)





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The Importance of Testing:

Infected cats may live for years if diagnosed early and treated properly. Early detection of infection will help you not only to maintain the health of your own cat, but also allow you to prevent spreading infection to other cats.

Fortunately, it is usually quite simple to diagnose infection. A small blood sample is all that's needed, and veterinarians often choose to perform the test right in the clinic (as we do here at The Cat Practice). You'll get the result of the "in-house" test in about 10 minutes, allowing you to consult with your veterinarian before leaving the clinic. In some cases, however, it may be necessary to follow up with a blood sample sent to a specialized veterinary laboratory. In this case, the result will usually be available to you within a week to 10 days.

The frequency of testing depends on your cat's lifestyle. If your cat lives strictly indoors (and *never* accidentally escapes outside), he should be tested *at least* twice in his lifetime. Since the viruses take anywhere from 2 weeks to 6 months to show a positive on the test, a negative result needs to be confirmed with a second test later on. Even according to the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP), your kitty should be FeLV/FIV tested every time he is sick as there are a variety of symptoms that are associated with the viruses. If your cat goes outdoors at all or lives with an infected cat, he should be tested every year or anytime he is sick.

When Your Cat Should be Tested:

- ⊙ If your cat has never been tested before.
- ⊙ If your cat is sick, even if it has tested negative in the past.
- ⊙ If you adopt a new cat or kitten, regardless of if it's been tested before.
- ⊙ If your cat may have been exposed to an infected cat (going outside or getting a bite wound).
- ⊙ If your cat lives with another cat who is infected.
- ⊙ Prior to receiving a feline leukemia vaccine.

Treatment For FeLV and FIV Positive Cats:

As mentioned above, neither disease can be cured but both can be managed if it's caught early. A cat can live many years if treated properly. This usually includes good nutrition and supporting the immune system with antiviral drugs. The biggest problems for infected cats isn't the disease itself but secondary diseases such as upper respiratory infections ("kitty cold"). Since the cat's immune system is affected by the disease, it can't fight off common pathogens that uninfected cats have no problems with.

Please talk to one of our technicians and/or veterinarians about the feline leukemia or FIV viruses, testing, or vaccinations. Ask us when the last time your cat was tested!

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