



Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)



Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) is a retrovirus in the lentivirus subfamily. FIV, similar to the Feline Leukemia Virus, attacks and disables the immune system of the cat. Some people compare the FIV to the HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) in people because they share the same subfamily classification. Both diseases are species specific. Humans do not contract the feline disease from their cats; neither do cats contract the human disease from their owner.

Transmission of the FIV is primarily through bite wounds. Cats that live equitably without fighting can live together with an FIV positive cat for months to years without exchanging the virus. Transmission from mother to kitten can occur during pregnancy and through infected milk when the kittens feed from their mother. Sexual contact is not a primary means of spreading FIV. This virus can survive for a few hours in the environment and is susceptible to common disinfectants like bleach.

FIV positive cats may have a diverse array of clinical signs. The virus attacks the immune system making them susceptible to numerous other bacterial and viral diseases. In general these cats have a poor coat, lose weight gradually over time, and have chronic recurrent fever and infection (often involving the mouth, bladder or upper respiratory tract). Eventually their numbers of functional white and red blood cells diminish, further removing their ability to defend themselves from incidental infections.

Blood testing is available to detect if your cat has FIV. The test measures the presence of antibodies to the virus. Once positive, the cat usually is positive for life. Occasionally false positives occur. Young kittens that have received antibodies through their mother's milk will often initially test positive for FIV. Subsequent tests (at age 6-8 months), if they are negative, indicate that these kittens have not become infected from that exposure to their infected mother.

Currently there is no vaccine available for the FIV. Neither is there a treatment or cure available. Treatment concentrates on dealing with the secondary infections that the cat succumbs to and making the cat as comfortable as possible. Predicting the life span of an infected cat is not possible. The prognosis declines if the cat has experienced several episodes of fever, wasting, and infection.

Prevent exposing your cat to the potential risk of infection with FIV. Consider keeping your cat indoors, and test new cats coming into your household for FIV and FeLV. If one of your cats is FIV positive consider isolating him or her from the rest of your cats. If this is not possible, discourage aggression and fighting amongst the cats and keep all your cats indoors so they do not infect other cats in the neighbourhood.

For more information on Feline Immunodeficiency Virus, talk to your veterinarian.

IMPORTANT NOTE: FIV cannot be transmitted to humans.

This information is provided to you as a courtesy by:



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