

Feline Leukemia and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus

Feline leukemia virus and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) are among the most common infectious diseases of cats. Feline leukemia virus and FIV both cause immunosuppression in cats. Feline leukemia virus was first described in 1964 and FIV was first reported in 1987. Up to one in 12 US cats tests positive for feline immunodeficiency virus, making the virus a leading cause of disease.

Disease Transmission

Feline leukemia virus infection (FeLV) can be transmitted several ways:

1. by the saliva of infected cats contaminating the eye, mouth, and nose membranes of non-infected cats via licking.
2. from mother to fetuses (developing kittens) during pregnancy.

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus is usually transmitted by a deep bite wound.

Disease

Most infected cats eliminate the virus and become immune (66%). In those cats that do not develop immunity, the virus spreads to the bone marrow (33%).

Proliferative and degenerative diseases may occur in any of the tissues invaded by the virus, or the virus may be indirectly responsible for other illnesses because of its immunosuppressive effect. Some of these cats will become latent carriers and will become clinically ill when stressed.

Diagnostic Tests

There is a very accurate in-house test for both these diseases.

Early detection of feline immunodeficiency virus is an important aspect of caring for cats, particularly cats with other diseases, and in preventing the virus's spread. By knowing the FIV infection status of all cats, we can help pet owners make critical decisions about medical care, protect the health of both FIV-positive and -negative cats, and give cat owners peace of mind."

Treatment

There is no effective treatment for the myeloproliferative (bone marrow) form of leukemia. Treatment is mainly supportive, and may require blood transfusions, prednisone, and anabolic steroids.

FelV cancer (lymphoma) has a better response to therapy. Treatment may include chemotherapy, glucocorticoids, interferon, Protein A, and supportive treatment.

There is only supportive care as a treatment for FIV.

Prevention Of FeLV and FIV

There are several preventive measures that can be taken to decrease the risk of contracting FeLV.

1. Cats can be FeLV tested, and then vaccinated if they are negative. Vaccination is recommended for high risk cats only.
2. Kittens may be tested at any age. However, infection in newborn kittens may not be detected until weeks to months after birth. Therefore, several FeLV tests during the first six months of life may be necessary to feel completely "safe" about a negative test result.
3. Multi-cat households with FeLV positive cats should be maintained as a closed colony. (No new cats should be brought into the household, to prevent the spread of infection to the new arrivals.)

Park Place Veterinary Hospital encourages all new cats coming into a household to be tested for Feline Leukemia and Feline Immunodeficiency Viruses.

Please ask us if you have any questions or concerns.