



## **Facts about Feline Immunodeficiency Virus**

### ***What is Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)?***

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus is in the same family of viruses as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV.) These viruses are all species-specific, meaning FIV **cannot** be transmitted from cats to humans, and humans can't transfer HIV to cats.

### ***Signs & Symptoms***

Shortly after initial FIV infection, a cat's white blood cell count begins to decline, causing progressive impairment of its immune system. Many cats will remain without symptoms for several years. Medical signs and symptoms are usually due to secondary infections and chronic degenerative conditions. Symptoms may include:

- Inflammation and chronic gingivitis in the mouth
- Diarrhea
- Fever
- Pneumonia
- Poor coat condition
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Skin disease
- Sinus infections
- Neurological problems

Many cats infected with FIV live a long life, especially if routine wellness care is provided to aid early disease detection, and exposure to other infectious disease is limited.

### ***How is FIV Transmitted?***

FIV is found in cat populations worldwide. Transmission mostly occurs through bite wounds because the FIV virus is contained in the blood, saliva, and cerebrospinal fluid of infected cats. The virus is fragile outside the body and does not survive in the environment, so transmission rarely occurs through close contact alone. FIV may be transmitted to unborn kittens if their mother is infected during pregnancy.

Unfortunately, there is no treatment for FIV, and once infected, a cat will carry the virus for the remainder of their life.

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## ***Vaccination and Testing for FIV***

- Vaccines for FIV are available, but not all cats will be protected by the vaccine and it is not currently recommended for all cats. The decision on whether or not to vaccinate a cat should be made on a case-by-case basis after consulting with a veterinarian.
- The routine test for FIV (ELISA blood test) detects antibodies against the virus and not the virus itself, so the vaccination will cause a cat to test positive. A second, confirmatory test may help differentiate a vaccinated from truly infected cat, but results from this test are sometimes hard for a veterinarian to interpret. Therefore, any cat which is vaccinated against FIV should be permanently identified with a microchip, tattoo, or collar.
- It's also important to note, that cats infected with FIV may take up to 60 days to test positive. Testing should be repeated by a veterinarian at least 60 days later to ensure a cat is truly not infected.

## ***Management***

- FIV positive cats should be kept indoors to prevent the spread of FIV-infection to other cats and to reduce their exposure to infections.
- FIV positive cats should be spayed or neutered, a well-balanced diet that is suited to their needs, and have check-ups every 6-12 months to monitor their weight, symptoms, and general health. Any changes in an FIV positive cat's behavior or health should be communicated to a veterinarian immediately.

*Adapted by Dr. Lisa Mekka from a website publication of the American Association of Feline Practitioners; originally contributed by Dr. Amy Lowe, DVM*

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