



## **Facts about Feline Leukemia Virus**

### ***What is Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)?***

Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) is a common infectious disease in cats. It is often found in environments where there are a lot of cats, like a multi-cat household or where feral cats live in a free-roaming environment.

### ***Signs and Symptoms of FeLV***

The signs and symptoms of FeLV vary greatly depending on the infected cells. Some cats show mild symptoms, but many cats don't have any noticeable symptoms. Signs may include:

- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Lethargy
- Poor coat or fur condition
- Enlarged lymph nodes
- Pale gums
- Infections of the skin, bladder, and upper respiratory
- Reproductive problems in unspayed females

Eventually, FeLV-associated diseases occur and can include:

- Anemia
- Liver disease
- Intestinal disease and reproductive problems
- Lymphoma or leukemia
- Chronic respiratory infections
- Chronic gingivitis and stomatitis (inflammation of the gums and mouth)
- Poor healing of wounds and abscesses

### ***How is FeLV Transmitted?***

- Transmission occurs through the saliva, feces, milk, and urine of an infected cat. The most common transmission route is through saliva. FeLV is transferred through grooming, licking, biting, shared dishes, and shared litter pans. An infected mother can transfer it to her kittens during pregnancy or nursing.
  - Close cat-to-cat contact is required to transmit the disease. FeLV can also be transmitted through a blood transfusion.
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- Young cats, especially those under 4-6 months of age, are the most susceptible to FeLV since their immune systems are not fully mature.
- FeLV **cannot** be transmitted to people, dogs, or other animals.

### ***Vaccination for FeLV***

- Vaccination against FeLV is recommended for all cats less than two years-old, cats with access to outdoors, cats living with known FeLV-infected cats, and cats living in multi-cat environments.
- Vaccination against FeLV is not 100% effective at preventing transmission of the virus. Though the vaccine should lessen the risk, any cat living with an FeLV-positive cat will be at risk of also contracting the disease.
- FeLV vaccination is also recommended for all kittens since they have an increased susceptibility to the virus.

### ***Treatment and Management***

- Unfortunately, there is no cure for FeLV. If your cat tests positive for FeLV and has a progressive infection, he will remain infected for the rest of his life.
- On average, cats who test positive for FeLV live for 2.5 years after their diagnosis; however, some individual do go on to have a normal life expectancy.
- A FeLV vaccination is not beneficial if a cat is already infected.
- FeLV infected cat need to remain indoors and should be neutered.
- Regular trips to the veterinarian can help a cat with FeLV feel well for as long as possible, protect them from secondary infection, and help manage your cat's condition, including the symptoms and any FeLV-associated diseases that may develop.

*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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