

FIV – What do I need to know?

FIV positive cats often lead long, healthy lives.

FIV is a virus that affects only cats, The initials stand for Feline Immunodeficiency Virus. This basically means that the effect of the virus is to reduce the cat's immune system, making it more susceptible to infection - put simply, it can't fight off infection as well as a non-FIV cat.

In itself, FIV is not serious; it is the other infections that the cat may pick up, which can cause the problem in an FIV cat, due to the weakness in the immune system.

It is important to realize that a positive test for FIV is not a mandatory death sentence. With a high protein diet and aggressive treatment of secondary infections, a FIV-positive cat can lead a reasonably normal life span.

The only sure way to protect cats is to prevent their exposure to the virus. **Keep you cats indoors.** Cat bites are the major way infection is transmitted. Keeping cats indoors and away from potentially infected cats that might bite them-markedly reduces their likelihood of contracting a FIV infection.

For the safety of the resident cats, only infection-free cats should be adopted into a household with uninfected cats.

For the safety of FIV+ cats, if they are bitten or exposed to a sick cat they are likely to become sick too. When they are exposed a good vet should see them as soon as possible so that treatment can be started before the cat gets sick or shows symptoms. Generally, early treatment like this will keep your FIV+ cat healthy & well.

Q: Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV): Is It the Same Virus That Causes AIDS in People?

A: No. The Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) also called the Feline AIDS Virus because of the similarities in the two diseases, which result. Fortunately, most viruses are species-specific. This is the case with the human AIDS virus and with FIV. The AIDS virus affects only humans, and the FIV affects only cats.

SUMMARY:

1. FIV is a slow virus that affects a cat's immune system over a period of years.
2. FIV is a cat-only disease and cannot be spread to humans or other non-felines.
3. FIV cats most often live long, healthy, and relatively normal lives with no symptoms at all.
4. Once your cat has FIV, it will always have FIV.
5. The virus can be spread through blood transfusions, badly infected gums, or serious, penetrating bite wounds. (Bite wounds of this kind are extremely rare, except in free-roaming, un-neutered tomcats.)
6. Many vets are not educated about FIV since the virus was only discovered 15 years ago.

THE BAD & THE GOOD:

FIV infection is associated with neurological disease, chronic renal failure, cancers (especially lymphoma), stomatitis (mouth and gum disease), respiratory conditions, diarrhea, urinary disorders, and wasting syndromes.

THIS CAN ALMOST ALWAYS BE AVOIDED WITH A HIGH PROTEIN DIET AND AGGRESSIVE TREATMENT OF SECONDARY INFECTIONS.

WHY KEEP YOUR CAT INDOORS?

In large multi-cat households where cats roam freely outdoors, the prevalence of FIV and FeLV (Feline Leukemia Virus), can reach as high as 70%. Cats roaming in urban areas are more likely to be exposed (40%) than cats roaming in rural areas (6%).

This article was compiled with information from the following sources:

The Winn Feline Foundation;

<http://www.winnfelinehealth.org/health/FeLV.html>

HDW Enterprises & Foothill Felines

<http://www.hdw-inc.com>

American Association of Feline Practitioners and the Cornell Feline Health Center,
Cornell University, College of Veterinary Medicine, Ithaca, New York

<http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/resources/brochure/fiv.html>

www.iams.com/

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