



Feline Immunodeficiency Virus

FIV stands for "feline immunodeficiency virus," just as HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. In fact, these two viruses are closely related and much of the general information that has become common knowledge for HIV also holds true for FIV. FIV is a virus that causes AIDS in cats; however, there is a long asymptomatic period before AIDS occurs and our job is to prolong this asymptomatic period. The average life expectancy from the time of diagnosis for FIV is 5 years. Humans cannot be infected with FIV; FIV is a cats-only infection. FIV is a viral disease transmitted from cat to cat by biting. The disease may also be transmitted from mother cat to kittens during pregnancy or in the milk after birth. Any cat that goes outside may be exposed to this disease. Unaltered male cats (tom cats) are very high risk due to their fighting behavior and frequent wounds.

Stages of Disease:

- 1.) Acute Stage - the cat first becomes infected. Typical signs include lethargy and fever. These signs may be very mild and go undetected.
- 2.) Latent or Silent Stage - the cat 'ignores' the virus. This second stage can last for many years. During this time the cat will have no symptoms and appear healthy. It is not known what causes the disease to leave this quiet phase and begin the chronic phase.
- 3.) Chronic Stage - Virus wins. This last stage of the disease begins when the virus mounts a new attack on the cat's body and immune system. These cats are more susceptible to other types of infections such as parasites, abscesses and dental disease.

Eventually, cats infected with FIV can die as a result of the immune system dysfunction. Early and aggressive treatment of any health problem will help prolong their quality and quantity of life. They should be kept indoors, fed a high quality diet and have routine health exams.

The only way to prevent exposure to FIV is to keep your cat indoors. Any cat/kitten that is added to the household should be screened for the disease as soon as possible. A vaccine to prevent FIV has recently been developed. Its use is controversial at this time and not currently given.

Points to remember:

- FIV infection is life-long
- There is no specific treatment
- The vaccine is controversial
- Regular check-ups are important
- The long term prognosis is poor

THE FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS IS NOT TRANSMISSIBLE TO HUMANS IN ANY WAY.