



FELINE LEUKEMIA VIRUS

ABOUT THE DISEASE

The **feline leukemia virus (FeLV)** affects feline patients in several ways, but the most common is through the development of certain types of cancer (lymphoma most commonly) and by compromising the immune system's ability to fight common infections. **FeLV** is often worse in patients co-infected with feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV). Please see the [Feline Immunodeficiency Virus](#) document for additional information.

FeLV can be transmitted through saliva, urine, nasal and eye secretions, in utero, sometimes milk while nursing, and through bite wounds. Some kittens that are born with **FeLV** survive to become adults but have intermittent illness during their lives.

In early stages of the infection, many feline patients are without symptoms and may remain normal for many years. Young patients are always at greatest risk. The median life expectancy following diagnosis is 2.5 years.

Symptoms are broad, as infection can happen in any body system, and lymphoma is often vague. Some may include:

- Widespread enlarged and hard lymph nodes
- Persistent fever
- Skin and ear infections
- Vomiting, diarrhea, and unwillingness to eat (anorexia)
- Low red blood cell count (anemia)
- Oral infections, gingivitis, and tooth loss
- Respiratory infections and pneumonia
- Seizures and neurologic disease

A **FeLV** vaccine exists and is highly recommended to all kittens. Boosters are required throughout the patient's life.

OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

A simple in-clinic blood test exists and is both sensitive and specific.

Reference laboratory testing also exists and is utilized to confirm results as some false positives do exist.

Early in the disease some patients have low levels of circulating viruses. As such, in-house testing will uncommonly test false-negative. For this reason, if a patient's symptoms are consistent with **FeLV**, some will have the test repeated one to several months later.

TREATMENT

There is no specific treatment for **FeLV**.

The most effective therapeutic goal is early detection of concurrent infections with early intervention.

Patients manifesting **FeLV** as cancer may undergo chemotherapy but will have a high chance of recurrence. Treatment should be focused on symptomatic management.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- All **FeLV**-positive patients should be isolated and kept strictly indoors.
- **FeLV**-positive patients should be examined every 6 months for early detection of disease.
 - Asymptomatic patients should still receive routine vaccinations if exposure to other cats is inevitable.