



FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS

ABOUT THE DISEASE

Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) (similar to HIV) is a fatal viral infection typically spread between feline patients through bite wounds. This virus is rarely transmitted to nursing kittens and through sexual transmission. The virus may exist on water bowls or litter boxes but is easily destroyed by diluted bleach.

FIV affects patients through two means:

- By weakening the immune system and increasing susceptibility to other infections (bacteria, viruses, fungi, etc.).
- By directly destroying some healthy cells so that they can no longer function properly.

After initial infection, some cats may have vague symptoms and a low-grade fever. However, many patients are asymptomatic and appear healthy for a variable period of time.

Symptoms are broad, as infection and damage can happen in any body system. Some may include:

- Skin and ear infections
- Vomiting, diarrhea, or unwillingness to eat (anorexia)
- Low red blood cell count (anemia)
- Oral infections, gingivitis, or tooth loss
- Respiratory infections and pneumonia
- Confusion and dementia

OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

All kittens and new cats to your household should be screened with a blood test done by your veterinarian.

If Positive, it is best to confirm the infection with an additional test typically sent to an outside laboratory.

Kittens (<6 months of age) that test positive should be retested when they are over six months old.

The FIV vaccine is no longer available in the United States, but it should be mentioned that cats who have been vaccinated for FIV will test positive on the screening tests.

TREATMENT

There is no specific treatment for FIV.

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

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Keep all FIV-positive patients strictly indoors. However, isolation is typically unnecessary in a stable household unless the FIV positive cat is likely to fight with other resident cats.
- Housemates should be screened annually for FIV.
- Do not introduce any new cats to the household.
- **Do not** feed raw foods to avoid exposure to parasites and pathogens that may cause infection.
- All FIV+ cats should have a veterinary exam once to twice yearly and yearly bloodwork and urinalysis.
- Monitor your cat for changes, even small ones may be significant in a FIV+ patient. Early intervention and treatment of secondary infections is crucial.