



FELINE PANLEUKOPENIA (DISTEMPER)

ABOUT THE DISEASE

Feline Panleukopenia (also called feline distemper) is a serious, highly contagious virus that hits kittens hard. It spreads fast through direct contact or contaminated items like bowls, litter boxes, and bedding. Places with lots of cats, such as shelters or rescues, see it most.

The virus lasts weeks or even years in the environment and is tough to kill—bleach soaks for 10 minutes help on hard surfaces, but soft items like blankets are often best thrown out.

A good vaccine exists as part of the FVRCP shot. It starts at 6-8 weeks old (or younger in high-risk spots) with boosters every 3-4 weeks. No vaccine is perfect, especially if doses are missed.

Signs include vomiting, diarrhea, low appetite, and tiredness. Kittens can quickly get dehydrated or very sick because the virus damages the gut and weakens their immune system. This raises the chance of serious problems or death.

In rare cases, an infected mother cat can pass issues to her kittens, leading to lifelong balance problems like wobbling or tremors. These cats can still live well with proper care.

OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis is usually initially suspected by a veterinarian upon initial physical examination. Supporting diagnostic testing, such as a CBC (blood test) is commonly performed. Kittens with Feline Panleukopenia will usually have low or no red and white blood cells. Low results of all white blood cell lines are usually diagnostic for this disease.

A rapid test exists to test for Canine Parvovirus and can sometimes be used in cats to detect Feline Panleukopenia. This test is not very sensitive for felines, but a positive result can help support the diagnosis.

TREATMENT

No specific treatment exists for Feline Panleukopenia, management is focused on symptomatic management. Kittens usually require intensive in-hospital care.

Overall, this virus carries a poor prognosis for survival, however if kittens are able to survive though the first few days of infection the long-term prognosis is good. Kittens the survive infection develop lifelong immunity to the virus

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Vaccination is extremely important in young kittens, and should be started early especially in environments with high numbers of kittens in a confined space
- This virus can persist in the environment for several years and can only be disinfected with bleach.