



FELINE LEUKEMIA VIRUS (FeLV)

What is FeLV?

The Feline Leukemia Virus is a common cause of various forms of blood related cancers in cats. It is capable of causing over 20 different forms of cancer including the very common lymphosarcoma and a number of leukemias (blood cancer cells free in the bloodstream). Lymphosarcoma is the most frequently diagnosed neoplasia (cancers and benign tumors) in cats. The virus does not survive long outside the host cat. It is NOT contagious to humans or dogs.

How Could My Cat Catch FeLV?

The virus is found in the saliva of infected cats, so transmission is generally through saliva transfers (bite wounds, mutual grooming, sneezing, and to a limited degree, sharing food and water dishes). The virus can also be transmitted to unborn kittens in an infected pregnant female.

Some exposed cats will develop a natural immunity to the virus. Others become permanently infected. Exposure to other positive cats in a household increases the likelihood to infection.

What are the Symptoms of FeLV Infections?

The virus can be responsible for many different disease conditions and therefore, a variety of symptoms may be present. The cat can appear normal and healthy at first, but later the infected cat often will undergo chronic wasting marked by anemia (low red blood cell counts), weakness, and loss of appetite. Depending on the kind of cancer and where it forms the signs will vary. Some cats can have breathing problems. Others will show signs of intestinal problems (vomiting and diarrhea). Some will show jaundice or yellowing of the skin.

Blood cell counts may be normal or show a variety of abnormal cells. There are also eye and nervous system forms with their associated symptoms (inflamed eye or pain or seizures). FeLV can also cause nonmalignant disease too (nonregenerative anemia and immunosuppression). These cats are predisposed to other diseases and infections,

including feline infectious peritonitis (FIP) and feline infectious anemia (FIA). Also it can cause diarrhea and fetal resorption and abortion. Any chronic infection or unresponsive fever is suspect.

How is FeLV Diagnosed?

The history and symptoms may be suggestive of the disease. A blood test can confirm the virus. Biopsies, Xrays, and ultrasound can be helpful in determining the location and type of cancer, if present.

How is It Treated?

Treatment is ineffective at eliminating the virus. Mainly the treatments are supportive (antibiotics, intravenous fluids, vitamins, and blood transfusions). Forced feeding may be needed too. Cancer therapy can prolong the cats life in some instances, but it will not eliminate the causative virus.

Is My Cat Going to Live?

Most infected cats will eventually die from the effects of FeLV, but supportive care often can keep it relatively healthy for years, providing a cancer has not yet developed. Various cancers and secondary infections are the greatest risk to these cats. An infected cat is contagious to other cats, so it should be kept isolated.

Prevention is Better than Treatment

There is a vaccination available. The vaccine is effective and safe. A kitten or cat should be tested negative for FeLV before the vaccination is given.

Call Us If...

- Your cat shows any sign of infection (skin, eyes, respiratory tract, or urinary bladder).
- Your cat takes a downturn in general health.
- Your cat loses its appetite or loses weight.

Thank you for this opportunity to serve you!