



## **PANLUEKOPENIA (Feline Distemper)**

### **What is Panleukopenia?**

Cat distemper is actually a virus disease that is related to parvo infections in dogs. It is very contagious and is shed in the vomit, urine, and stool of a sick cat or a recovered cat for up to six weeks. It spreads from one cat to another by direct contact or on contaminated objects. The virus is very resistant and can live in the environment for years (but can be destroyed with diluted household bleach).

### **What are the Symptoms of Panleukopenia?**

The virus uses rapidly dividing cells in the host cat for its own replication, so the signs of the disease are associated with the destruction of the tissues these cells are a part of. After a 2-10 day incubation period, the cat will develop a fever, lose its appetite, and become depressed and weak. Diarrhea and vomiting will rapidly lead to severe dehydration, through infected cats will seem thirsty and often lie with their heads over the water dish. The white blood count drops dangerously low early in the disease, allowing secondary infection to enter the body through the inflamed digestive tract.

Without treatment, the disease is usually over in five to seven days with a death rate of 60-90%. Kittens may die within 12 hours of onset. A pregnant cat may abort its kittens, or if it survives, it may have abnormal kittens.

### **How is Panleukopenia Diagnosed?**

The history of a young cat unvaccinated or incompletely vaccinated and showing the typical signs of panleukopenia is highly suggestive. Blood tests can confirm the disease.

### **How is It Treated?**

***THIS IS AN EMERGENCY!*** Treatment must be started immediately if there is much hope of recovery. Treatment consists mainly of maintaining normal hydration levels and protecting internal organs with intravenous fluids. Antibiotics will help protect against invading bacteria. It is up to the cat to get rid of the virus causing the infection though.

### **Is My Cat Going to Live?**

A rule of thumb is that if it survives 5-7 days, it will probably recover.

### **Can My Dog Catch It?**

No, panleukopenia is just a disease of the cat family. Dog distemper is a different disease. Though parvo is related to the panleukopenia virus, cats can't catch parvo.

### **Prevention is Better than Treatment**

Vaccinations will prevent the disease. All kittens should be given a series of vaccinations starting at 8 weeks of age and repeating every 3-4 weeks until they are 16 weeks old. Thereafter annual booster vaccinations are recommended. Once a cat contracts panleukopenia, a vaccination won't help, but recovered cats should be vaccinated to protect them from the other diseases included in the vaccine.

*Thank you for this opportunity to serve you!*