

# Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) and Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV): THE FACTS

## Keep Your Cat Indoors Only

Now that you know your cat has an infectious disease, the responsible thing is to prevent the spread of this disease in your community.

- **No raw foods.** There are currently numerous fad diets involving raw foods for pets. Uncooked foods, meats especially, can include parasites and pathogens that a cat with a normal immune system might be able to handle, but an FIV-positive cat might not. Stick to the major reputable cat food brands.

- **Vaccinations.** Continue vaccinating your FIV or FeLV-positive cat the same way you would for any non-infected cat (for rabies, distemper, etc.). Ask your veterinarian for specific information and the latest recommendations on cat immunizations.

- **Parasite Control.** The last thing an FIV or FeLV-positive cat needs is to be challenged by fleas, worms, or mites. There are many effective treatment products on the market. Your veterinarian can tell you which parasites you should be especially concerned with and which product is right for your cat.

## Quick Facts About FIV-Positive Cats

- FIV is a slow growing virus that weakens the immune system over a period of years, shortening the lifespan of an FIV-infected cat.

- FIV is a cat-only disease that cannot be spread to humans or other non-felines.

- FIV is spread through serious, penetrating bite wounds—most often from feral tomcats who have not been neutered. The virus can also be spread through blood transfusions, and a mother cat might infect her kittens while they're in the womb or transmit the virus through her milk after they are born.

- FIV is not spread casually between cats, through their water or food bowls, or by their litter boxes. Cuddling, playing, and casual physical contact do not spread the virus.

- Before the FIV virus was discovered in 1986, FIV-positive cats and non-FIV cats lived together peacefully without any problems.

- Those who are immune-suppressed, whether human or feline, are more prone to infection by opportunistic microorganisms (such as bacteria and viruses). They can also shed larger numbers of these infectious agents

than those with strong immune systems. Thus, an immune-suppressed human owning an immune-suppressed cat is not a good idea. The same is true for multiple immune-suppressed cats living together. If possible, there should be only one immune-suppressed individual per household.

- FIV itself does not shorten a cat's life span. Because FIV affects a cat's immune system, it is more difficult for an FIV-positive cat to fight off disease. For that reason, an FIV-positive cat requires a diligent owner who will take him or her to the vet twice a year for checkups, and immediately, at the first sign of illness.

- FIV-positive cats are no different from other cats, often living long, healthy lives, never showing any symptoms at all.

## What It Is

The name pretty well describes it. FIV is a virus that infects cats and causes a deficiency in their immune system. Once a cat has been infected and a blood test has confirmed it, the cat is considered to be FIV-positive.

## What It Isn't

FIV is not HIV, the virus that cause AIDS in people. You can't be infected by FIV. An FIV-positive cat is not a health threat to you or your family members.

## Quick Facts About FeLV-Positive Cats

- FeLV is a retrovirus that affects the cat's ability to fight off infection. FeLV is an incurable, cat-only disease. It cannot be spread to humans or other non-felines, nor is it airborne.

- FeLV is diagnosed through a blood test. The virus can cause a form of blood cancer commonly referred to as feline leukemia.

- FeLV is typically transmitted through close and prolonged contact, or through a serious, penetrating bite. The virus is spread through saliva and nasal secretions by mutual grooming, nose-to-nose contact, and shared food and water bowls.

- FeLV can also be found (in lesser amounts) in tears, urine, and feces. Thus, litter boxes can be a source of infection in multi-cat households. It is recommended that FeLV-positive cats not come in contact with uninfected cats.

- A mother can infect her kittens while they are

still in the womb and also through nursing.

- Because FeLV affects a cat's immune system, it is more difficult for an FeLV-positive cat to fight off disease. For that reason, an FeLV-positive cat requires a diligent owner who will take him or her to the vet twice a year for checkups, and immediately, at the first sign of illness.

- FeLV can remain latent in a cat's system for years. A low-stress environment, a healthy diet, immune-boosting vitamins, and a life indoors are essential for an FeLV-positive cat.

## Should I Adopt an FIV or FeLV-Positive Cat?

That depends. The downside is that the cat will probably have a shorter lifespan and you may have extra vet bills along the way. Of course, because you and your veterinarian will already know that the cat is infected, you'll probably develop an effective approach to vet care that can minimize extra expenses (by avoiding treatments that aren't totally necessary, etc.).

If this sounds like a raw deal, look at it from the cat's perspective. Not only does it have a shortened life expectancy, it is also facing an uphill battle to find a forever home. Few people want to make the emotional and financial investment in a pet that could die sooner. Hopefully, the information we are presenting here will help increase those numbers.

As with their human owners, even "healthy" cats don't come with guarantees regarding health and longevity.

*This information has been brought to you by Hearts4Paws, a non-profit, no-kill volunteer animal shelter organization.*



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