



Feline Calicivirus



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Feline Calicivirus (FCV) is a virus of the family Caliciviridae that is an important cause of upper respiratory infections (URIs) and oral disease in cats. FCV can be isolated from about 50% of cats with URIs. This virus infects cats throughout the world and can cause disease in both domestic and exotic cats. Cheetahs are the other species of the family Felidae known to become infected naturally.

FCV attacks the respiratory tract (nasal passages and lungs), the mouth (with ulceration of the tongue), the intestines and the musculoskeletal system. Feline calicivirus is highly communicable in unvaccinated cats, and is commonly seen in multi-cat environments, such as shelters, poorly ventilated households, pet stores and breeding catteries. The prevalence of FCV varies depending on the environment. In private homes, FCV is present in about 10% of cats (either active or carrier state), while the prevalence in shelters and catteries is estimated at 25 - 40%.

Feline calicivirus replicates in the oral and respiratory tissues, and is secreted in saliva, feces, urine, and respiratory secretions. It can be transmitted through the air, orally, and on fomites. Susceptible cats can get infected by direct contact with another infected cat or by environmental exposure to objects that have been contaminated with infectious secretions. People that have touched contaminated objects, or an infected cat, can also spread the virus to susceptible cats.

Clinical signs in cats infected with FCV may develop acutely, chronically, or not at all. It is worthwhile to note that latent or subclinical infections often become clinical when the cat is stressed, such as at the time of adoption.

Symptoms of Feline Calicivirus Infection in Cats can include:

Fever	Anorexia (loss of appetite)	Lethargy	Nasal discharge	Sneezing	Conjunctivitis
Eye discharge	Stomatitis (ulceration of the mouth)	Difficulty breathing post pneumonia			
Pneumonia	Bleeding from various sites	Arthritis (<u>Limping Syndrome</u> caused by joint inflammation)			
Lameness	Painful walk	Ulcers on: Tongue, Tip of nose, Lips, Hard palate, Around the claws			

Diagnosis of FCV is difficult without specific tests, because the signs are similar to other feline respiratory diseases, especially feline viral rhinotracheitis. You will need to provide the veterinarian with a detailed history of your cat's health, onset of symptoms, and share information about possible incidents or conditions that might have led to the current illness.

Depending on the conclusions of the physical exam, the veterinarian may recommend further diagnostic tests. Normally a complete blood profile, chemical blood profile, complete blood count and a urinalysis will be performed. The results of these tests, however, are often non-specific. If the cat is showing signs of lameness, the veterinarian may recommend X-Rays to rule out other causes such as an injury.

There is no specific treatment for FCV. Most cats with an uncomplicated calicivirus infection can be treated symptomatically at home. However, the cat will need to be hospitalized for intensive care if he/she has developed pneumonia, is experiencing severe life-threatening hemorrhages, or is not eating and drinking.

While there is no specific medication that is given for viral infections of this type, broad spectrum pet antibiotics are given to prevent or treat secondary bacterial infections that are commonly seen with viral infections. If the eyes are affected, ophthalmic antibiotics are prescribed and cats with painful walking can be given veterinary prescription pain medication. Some cats with FCV require the placement of feeding tubes until their ulcers have healed and they are willing to eat on their own.

Prevention

Natural immunity from maternal antibodies lasts in the kittens from 3 to 9 weeks. After that, kittens are susceptible to FCV. Even though vaccinations have not eliminated this virus, an FCV vaccine is still the best preventative for your cat, and may reduce the symptoms should your cat acquire the virus.

The standard core vaccines that are given to cats include immunization against calicivirus. FCV vaccine is given as a series of boosters to kittens (8 and 16 weeks), and at least one other booster a year later. After this initial series, the vaccine will need to be boosted on a regular basis every one to three years in adults. It is particularly important to give your cat a booster vaccine before he/she is placed in a high-risk situation such as boarding, grooming, cat shows, or otherwise being exposed to cats that could be potential carriers of FCV.

[Please make sure to discuss with your veterinarian the specifics of your situation to receive proper advice on the recommended booster schedule for your individual cat.](#)



“There is nothing so patient, in this world or any other, as a virus searching for a host.” – Mira Grant