



Feline Leukemia Virus



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Feline leukemia is a very common disease that impairs the cat's immune system, making the cat susceptible to illness and secondary infection. It is often called the "friendly cat" disease as it is commonly spread from cat to cat through casual contact, such as grooming or sharing food or water. Kittens are much more susceptible to the virus. FeLV can be transmitted to a kitten at birth or through the mother's milk.

FeLV is one of the most common infectious diseases in cats, affecting an estimated 1-3% of all cats. Infection rates are higher (up to 30%) in cats that are ill or at risk. Cats at greatest risk of FeLV infection are those that may be exposed to infected cats, cats allowed outdoors without supervision where they may be bitten by an infected cat, and kittens born to infected mothers. The virus is shed in saliva, nasal secretions, urine, feces, and milk of infected cats. Luckily, the prevalence of FeLV in cats have decreased significantly in the past three decades since the development of an effective vaccine and accurate testing procedures.

It is worthwhile to note that cats with feline leukemia do not always appear sick. In the early stages of the disease, most cats show few signs but as the disease progresses, **some of the most common symptoms include:**

Loss of appetite	Progressive weight loss	Lethargy	Generalized weakness	Bad breath/pale gums
Inflammation of the gums and/or mouth tissues (gingivitis/stomatitis)			Runny eyes or nose	
Inflammation of the nose, the cornea, or the moist tissues of the eye			Vomiting	Anemia
Persistent diarrhea	Lymphoma (most common FeLV associated cancer)			Fibrosarcoma

Most veterinarians screen for FeLV as part of the routine tests protocol a cat gets during his/her lifetime. A simple blood test is available to determine whether the cat has FeLV. If the result is negative, the vet may recommend protecting the cat from FeLV by having him/her vaccinated. If the cat tests positive for FeLV, it is important to keep in mind that it is NOT a death sentence! Cats with FeLV may have a normal lifespan if other illnesses can be prevented. Regular veterinary care (at least twice-a-year) is of utmost importance as well as good nutrition, and controlling any secondary bacterial, viral or parasitic infections.



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