

Please help me.



I have FIV—kitty AIDS. No one wants me. Will you help me find a home?

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) is a relatively new virus that is in the same family as viruses that cause acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) in human beings. Although FIV is structurally similar to HIV (the human immunodeficiency virus) and causes a disease in cats similar to AIDS in humans, it is a highly species-specific agent and affects only felines.

FIV-infected cats are found worldwide. In the United States, approximately 1.5 to 3% of cats are infected with FIV. Free-roaming male cats — especially aggressive ones — are the most frequently infected, while cats housed exclusively indoors are much less likely to be infected.

How is FIV spread?

The primary mode of transmission is through bite wounds. Cat-to-cat transmission of FIV in multiple-cat households where there is no fighting among cats appears to be quite uncommon. Ideally, any infected should be separated from non-infected ones, but in reality, if fighting or rough play is not taking place, the risk to the non-infected cats appears to be low.

On rare occasions, the disease is transmitted from an infected mother cat to her kittens during gestation, during passage through the birth canal, or when the newborn kittens ingest infected milk. Sexual contact probably is not a primary means of spreading FIV.

What are the signs of the disease?

Clinical signs of FIV appear throughout the body. Poor coat condition and persistent fever with a loss of appetite are commonly seen. Infection and inflammation of the gums (gingivitis) and mouth (stomatitis) are present in about half of the cats infected with FIV. Chronic or recurrent skin, urinary bladder, and upper respiratory tract infections are often present. Persistent diarrhea can be a problem. Inflammation of the tissues of the eye occurs frequently, but in most cats the damage is not clinically apparent. Slow but progressive weight loss also is common, followed by severe wasting late in the disease process. Abortion of kittens or other reproductive failures have been noted in infected queens. Some infected cats experience seizures, mental deterioration, and other neurological disorders. Some FIV-infected cats have recurrent illness interspersed with periods of relative health between episodes. In those cases, low white blood cell counts and anemia also appear to cycle, with episodes of low cell counts followed by recovery to nearly normal levels. However, the overall trend seems to be progressive, with cell counts dropping lower with each subsequent episode.

How is FIV diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on the history, clinical signs, and results of an FIV antibody test. The presence of FIV antibody in "positive" test results indicates that a cat is infected with FIV—probably for its lifetime—and thus is capable of transmitting the virus to other cats. Since false-positive test results can occur, positive results should be confirmed using a test with a different format. Occasionally, an FIV test is reported as equivocal or indeterminate. Retesting in 8 to 12 weeks usually results in either a positive or a negative result. Young kittens may have positive test results for 12 to 16 weeks after birth, without actually being infected with FIV, because of passive transfer of FIV antibodies from the mother. Only a small percentage of these kittens actually are or will become infected. For this reason, kittens with positive antibody tests must be retested when they are 6 to 8 months of age to determine their true infection status.

How can I help my FIV+ cat?

One of the most important things you can do is to protect your cat from exposure to the infectious agents that cause severe disease and death in immunosuppressed animals. The use of antimicrobial drugs to control bacterial and fungal infections may be moderately successful but must be continued for long periods, or reinstated as new infections occur. Anti-inflammatory drugs may be indicated in some cases to control gingivitis and stomatitis. Anabolic steroids may help to combat weight loss and wasting. Keep

in mind that these measures are not directed at combating the virus itself. Some of the drugs useful in therapy for AIDS patients may also have the potential against FIV, but they are expensive and difficult to obtain, and side-effects appear to be greater in cats than in humans. Drugs designed to enhance or modify the immune system might be of benefit in treating FIV infections. Even these drugs only suppress the effects of the virus and do not destroy it.

How long can I expect my FIV+ cat to live?

It is impossible to accurately predict the life expectancy of a cat infected with FIV. Under ideal conditions, such as isolation of the FIV-infected cat from other cats, many cats will remain in apparent good health for many months to a number of years after the initial infection. If your cat has already had one or more severe illnesses as a result of FIV infection, or if persistent fever and weight loss are present, a much shorter survival time can be expected.

My FIV+ cat died recently. Is it safe to bring a new cat into my home?

Feline immunodeficiency virus is fairly unstable outside the cat and will not survive for more than a few hours in most environments. However, FIV-positive cats are frequently infected with other bacteria and viruses which may pose some threat to a newcomer, so precautions should be taken. Thoroughly clean and disinfect or replace food and water dishes, bedding, litter pans and toys. A dilute solution of household bleach (2 oz. bleach in 1 gal. water) makes an excellent disinfectant. Vacuum carpets and mop floors with an appropriate cleanser. Any new cats or kittens should be properly vaccinated against other infectious agents before entering the household.

Will you help an FIV+ cat?

Caring for Cats tries to find homes for all the cats who come to us. Some have special needs, like the FIV+ cats described here. They need special people to care for them.

Peanuts

I am only two years old and I am FIV positive. I was rescued, along with my four kittens, way on the east side of Wisconsin. By some very fortunate connections, I ended up in a foster home with Caring for Cats. All my kittens have been tested, are negative—thank goodness—and have found new homes. I am very gentle and will not infect other cats. I could live for quite a while and be very healthy as long as I am not exposed to other cat diseases. Could you make a home for me?

Bogart

I was rescued Christmas Eve 2001. I was living under a trailer with a female cat and three kittens. They are all FIV negative, but I am not. I am a very, very big long-haired gray cat with a beautiful mane. I love to be petted and brushed. I was very suspicious of humans at first, but I have grown to love and trust my foster mom and would do the same for you. I'm not so sure about other cats, however. (Actually I am sure. I'm sure I would rather be the only pet.) Can you find it in your heart to trust and love me?

Matou

I am a six- or seven-year old snowshoe Siamese mix—mostly mix. I was rescued in the Rochester area and Caring for Cats agreed to take me in when my rescuers found out I was FIV+. Except for having some bad teeth, which have been pulled, I am healthy. I have a few scars on my face, but I think they will heal over eventually. Sleeping is my favorite thing, but I also love having my head and neck scratched. Can you find room for me?