

ORANGE VILLA
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This article and many others can be found at: www.orangevillavet.com

Feline AIDS vaccine available

The Feline Immunodeficiency Virus is a retrovirus very similar to the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, which causes AIDS in people. The cat versions, while similar only causes disease in cats and is not contagious to humans or dogs. The virus causes many problems in cats, including immune suppression, anemia, severe oral disease, and can stimulate cancer growth.

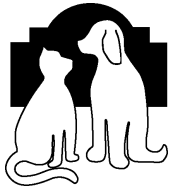
Infection occurs mainly through bite wounds, but can also be transmitted from queen to kitten, or sexual intercourse. It is estimated that up to 14% of cats carry the virus. Once infected, cats can carry the virus from months to years, spreading the disease through catfights. Male outdoor-unn neutered cats are at highest risk for the disease since they roam and fight more. Infection with the feline leukemia virus at the same time is common.

Unlike the leukemia virus, which some cats immune systems can successfully fight off, the FIV virus is much more difficult to fight off, since it attacks immune cells. Generally, once infected, the disease is terminal in a period ranging from months to years, due to the anemia, cancer, or a secondary infection due to an impaired immune system. Due to the cost of HIV medications, anti-viral treatment is quite expensive (but is effective in increasing length and quality of life). Acupuncture has shown some benefit to infected cats as well. Other procedures such as immunomodulators and bone marrow transplants have also been performed.

Presentation of FIV/feline AIDS cats include:

- fever with enlarged lymph nodes
- oral lesions
- abscess
- lethargy
- anemia
- urinary problems
- vomiting/diarrhea
- tumors

Cats who get sick from secondary infections are treated with supportive care and antibiotics. This of course, does not eliminate the virus. Eventually, infected cats succumb to anemia, secondary infections, or cancer.



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Testing is available. Generally a screening test is recommended for all cats as kittens. If they ever go outside, then the cats are re-tested if they ever show the above signs. If the initial screening test is positive, a more accurate test is sent to our outside lab for verification.

If your cat tests positive on either test:

- they must stay indoors so they do not spread the disease
- you must watch for secondary problems
- you can discuss antiviral therapy

This is a very preventable disease. The best way to prevent it is to keep your cat indoors. This prevents fighting and intercourse which can lead to infection. There is also a new vaccine available. The vaccine is given annually, after a series of three vaccines initially. The vaccine is about 85% effective in preventing infection. Unfortunately, the vaccine has a major drawback. Vaccinated cats test positive on most blood tests thereafter. So before vaccination, a FIV test must be performed and vaccines must not be missed.

Because of the testing positive factor and that the disease is not as prevalent in our area (due to the coyotes eating outdoor cats) we are not recommending the vaccine for all feline patients. We recommend the vaccine for cats that tend to go outside or escape and tend to be fighters. If your cat is in this category, please discuss having the vaccination.