



What is Feline Leukemia (FeLV)

Feline leukemia virus, a retrovirus, is a common infection of outdoor cats. It is the cause of more cat deaths, directly or indirectly, than any other organism and is widespread in the cat population.

How is it Spread?

FeLV transmission most commonly occurs through close, social contact. Contact with saliva from infected cats is a primary mode of transmission, because the concentration of virus is high in saliva. But virus is also shed in blood, urine, feces, nasal secretions, and milk. Sharing food and water dishes, using the same litterbox, mutual grooming, and bite wounds are all possible methods of transmission. Infected queens can infect fetuses during pregnancy. Infected queens can infect neonates when the babies drink the infected milk. Transmission can also happen via blood transfusions or contaminated needles/instruments.

Prevention of FeLV

Cats are most vulnerable to the virus as kittens. Booster vaccinations are generally used in adult cats only if they have continuing risk of exposure. Leukemia is almost-entirely preventable with just two kitten vaccines and a booster one year later. After that, even if the cat is exposed, the vaccines will help protect it -- plus the cat will naturally be more resistant to infection because of its age. Kittens may be tested at any age. However, infection in newborn kittens may not be detected until weeks to months after birth.

Symptoms

There are four separate classes of infection: abortive, regressive, latent, and progressive. Signs that a cat is FeLV positive are **Inappetance, weight loss, poor coat condition, persistent fever, inflammation of the gums and mouth, skin, urinary, and upper respiratory tract infections, persistent diarrhea, seizures, behavior changes, and other neurological disorders, and a variety of eye conditions**

Treatment

There is no effective treatment for the myeloproliferative (bone marrow) form of leukemia. Treatment is mainly supportive, and may require blood transfusions, prednisone, and anabolic steroids. FeLV cancer (lymphoma) has a better response to therapy than the myeloproliferative diseases do. Treatment may include chemotherapy, glucocorticoids, interferon, Protein A, and supportive treatment. The prognosis for infected cats is highly variable. It depends upon the specific disease the cat gets during the course of infection and the availability of supportive treatment for secondary infections. A small percentage of FeLV-positive cats may remain healthy for several years, but the prognosis for persistently FeLV-positive cats is poor, as most of the infected cats living within cluster households will die within three years from the time of diagnosis.