

# Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)



## What is FIV?

FIV, or Feline Immunodeficiency Virus, is a life-threatening disease of cats similar to human HIV/AIDS that affects **only cats**. Like a person with HIV, a cat can be infected with FIV and enjoy a good quality of life for quite some time before developing full blown disease. There is no cure for FIV, and cats with this disease are vulnerable to a number of secondary infections due to a suppressed immune system. Ultimately, this is a fatal disease.

## Can I prevent FIV in my cat?

It is estimated that between 2-25% of the global domestic cat population is infected with the virus. FIV is primarily transmitted from cat to cat through biting. In March of 2002 the USDA approved the use of an FIV vaccine manufactured under the brand name Fel-O-Vax. The efficacy rate of the vaccine has been reported to be 67-84%.

## Who gets FIV?

Although some wild cats can get FIV, there is no evidence that this disease is transmissible to any other species besides felines. Although it can affect cats of any age or sex, this disease is most commonly seen in intact adult male cats who are more likely to engage in fighting that leads to bite wounds.

## How is FIV spread?

FIV is not very readily spread. The main route of transmission is through bites. It is rarely spread through casual contact, and cats may cohabitate for years without transmitting the disease. However, bites are relatively likely to occur when a cat is newly introduced into a group. Therefore, introduction of an FIV positive cat to a household with FIV negative cats (or vice versa) poses a moderate risk of disease transmission.

Kittens born to FIV positive mothers are at low risk for infection, although they may initially test positive due to the presence of maternal antibodies in shared blood at the time of birth.

## How is FIV diagnosed?

Blood tests are available for screening for FIV. The most commonly used test is the ELISA test, which looks for viral antibodies in the blood. For specific details check with your family veterinarian.

The blood test is quite accurate, but false positives and occasionally false negatives do occur. To be absolutely certain, cats must be tested 1-3 months after their last known exposure. Kittens under 5 months old may test positive due to the presence of maternal antibodies OR true infection.

## What does the future hold for a FIV positive cat?

Cats with FIV can live for a number of years without symptoms. However, most infected cats will develop “feline AIDS related complex” by the time they are 3-6 years old, developing a number of secondary conditions such as severe oral disease and various infectious conditions. Most FIV positive cats go on to develop full blown AIDS by the time they are 6-8 years old, and die soon after. Cats that are showing clinical signs at the time of diagnosis will likely die much sooner than those that are healthy at the time of diagnosis. Treatment consists of good nourishment, protection from stress and infectious disease, and management of secondary conditions. There is no cure for FIV infection, though the efficacy of various antiviral agents in treating the disease is an area of active research.

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This sheet is intended for general informational purposes only and is not, and should not be considered by you as a substitute for professional training and/or medical advice. If your animal appears sick or is exhibiting unusual or aggressive behavior, please seek medical attention immediately or contact a professional trainer in your area.