

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)

After discovering that our cat tested positive for FIV, I searched for information regarding this disease. There was little to be had. I'm sure I'm not the only person trying to find out more about FIV so I'm sharing what I have learned to answer what questions I can. If you have information that I have not covered please send it so we may all be more knowledgeable about this disease. Please also send questions and I will attempt to find the answers.

Q: Can I catch it from my cats?

No. You cannot catch FIV from your cat. FIV is not transmissible to humans.

Q: What if I snuggle with my infected cat and then pet another cat, will I give it to that cat?

No. FIV is only transmissible through cat bites or blood transfusions with another cat. You cannot "spread" FIV with you throughout your day.

Q: Can my cat give it to my dog?

No. FIV is strictly in felines. Your cat cannot give FIV to your dog, horse, ferret...

Q: Can I be a carrier?

No. Humans cannot be carriers for FIV.

Q: Can my infected cat give it to my other cat(s)?

Yes, but only if your infected cat bites another of your cats. He can't infect your other cat(s) by sharing food bowls or sharing litter boxes or playing or sleeping together.

Q: Is there a vaccine against FIV?

YES!! There is now an easily available inexpensive shot (\$18 is what I paid) to vaccinate your non-FIV cats against contracting FIV from your FIV+ cat. The shot is two staged. First one shot then two weeks later the second shot. There are no side effects from what I have

seen after trying it on two of our new cats.

Q: How long does my cat have to live?

If you keep your cat strictly indoors and in a healthy environment (i.e., away from any sick cats) he/she can still live a happy long life. Our first FIV+ cat made it to 14 1/2 years young, he got FIV when he was 5, and he was as healthy as a cat can be until right at the end.)

Q: Is there a cure?

No. There is no cure for this virus yet but testing is ongoing. There is a vaccine, however, that you can give your cat to keep him from getting FIV.

Q: Do false positives occur?

Yes. False-positives do occur especially in heavily vaccinated cats. Have your cat tested again with another type of test- an indirect immunofluorescent antibody assay (IFA); or Western blotting. These rarely give a false-positive reading when properly conducted.

Q: How long after a cat has been bitten by an infected cat will test results be accurate?

From what I've read, initial signs of infection usually show up around four weeks after infection.

Q: Is the FIV only transmitted through contact with the infected blood?

No. The FIV seems to be transmitted predominantly by bites since the virus is shed in the saliva of the infected cat.

Also this virus is not contracted through sexual activity, however it is wise of course to not allow procreation to take place with these animals.

Q: Does the uninfected cat also have to bite the infected cat to get the virus?

No. The bite can be one-way.

Q: Can a cat contract FIV from a dental cleaning at the vet's?

No. Highly improbable. Instruments are always cleaned or replaced between dental cleanings regardless of the animal's health.

Q: Is there a FIV equivalent for dogs?

To my knowledge, no there is not an immunodeficiency virus equivalent for dogs. I have only heard of FIV (feline), HIV (human), SIV (simian), and BIV (bovine).

Q: Should an FIV-positive cat still be given vaccinations?

Yes, your cat should still be vaccinated though FIV+. The reasons are twofold. One: your cat is now more susceptible to these diseases and does not have the luxury of the vaccinations guarding him as well or as long as a healthy cat. Usually, there is an "overlap" with the booster shots so that the cat is always protected but in the case of FIV+ cats the boosters don't last as long in their systems ergo they are open to the diseases sooner. For this reason you should have your FIV+ cat vaccinated regularly (on time). They WILL offer him protection from these diseases. Two: There is a rabies quarantine in effect. You must have your cat, regardless of FIV, vaccinated against rabies. We don't want a rabies breakout. On the other hand...see Tom Hapka's article below for a reason NOT to vaccinate.

Christina from a veterinary clinic writes:

An FIV+ cat should definitely be vaccinated, but only killed virus vaccines should be used. These are vaccines that will not challenge the cat's immune system as much and prevent them from becoming sick from a simple vaccine.

Q: Is there "natural treatment" available?

We have noticed a remarkable change for the better since applying some of the suggestions from the following book which I cannot praise enough: "The Veterinarians' Guide to Natural Remedies for Cats - Safe and Effective Alternative Treatments and Healing Techniques from the Nation's Top Holistic Veterinarians" by Martin Zucker. ISBN 0-609-80373-5