



What is feline leukemia (FeLV)?

Feline leukemia, FeLV, is a virus-based disease that can suppress a cat's immune system and impair its ability to fight off other viruses, bacteria and even fungus. It can cause life-threatening anemia, lymphoma (a cancer affecting lymphatic tissue) and lead to serious health problems including stomatitis, digestive problems or upper respiratory infections.

Can humans become infected with the feline leukemia virus?

No, humans can't be infected. The feline leukemia virus only affects cats.

Can FeLV be treated?

There is no known cure for FeLV at this time. No medication has successfully eliminated the virus from an infected cat. Medications can treat or even resolve secondary illnesses but won't kill the virus causing the underlying disease.



OLIVER HAS FELINE LEUKEMIA

Can FeLV-positive cats have a good life?

Yes! Cats with FeLV can lead rich, happy lives; they deserve a life that is as normal as possible. They relish their families, sunspots, playtime and other activities just like other cats. Many adopters describe their experience with FeLV-positive cats as deeply rewarding and would gladly adopt another FeLV cat.

What is the average life expectancy for a cat with FeLV?

There is no set life expectancy for FeLV-positive cats. Much depends on the cat's immune system and ability to fight off the virus and other diseases. Of adult cats with the feline leukemia virus:

- A little over half will become latent carriers. They won't be seriously affected by the virus but will continue to test positive for FeLV.
- A little under half will succumb to the disease within two to five years after infection.

Currently there's no way to tell which adult cats will become carriers and which will become ill. Many adult cats can live many healthy years with the virus. Kittens have a weaker immune system than adults and around eighty percent do not live past three years; most die within a year. Young cats tend to die from feline infectious peritonitis (FIP), lymphoma or bone marrow disease. Cats that contract the virus as an adult tend to handle the disease better.

How would I care for an FeLV-positive cat?

Most of the medical care for cats with FeLV involves supportive care to keep them healthy including regular visits to the doctor, prompt dental care, a high-quality diet, vitamins, a low-stress home and a loving, vigilant caregiver who will closely monitor the cat's health and well-being.

FeLV-positive cats may have a shorter lifespan than other cats, may get sick more easily, and should see a veterinarian as soon as a problem is noticed. Veterinary check-ups are recommended every six months, even when the cat is healthy. Weigh the cat monthly and record its weight in a log book to watch for any weight loss. Monitor the cat's activity level: fatigue or shortness of breath may be a sign of life-threatening anemia and should be checked by a simple blood test at the veterinarian.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION

FELINE LEUKEMIA VIRUS (FeLV)*



How would I care for an FeLV-positive cat? (continued)

FeLV-positive cats must be kept indoors. This is both to protect them and their fragile immune system, and also to prevent them from possibly infecting another cat with the leukemia virus.

Good dental care is especially important for cats with FeLV. Cats with a compromised immune system often cannot fight off the bacteria in their mouth and, as a result, may have chronic stomatitis or other dental problems. If their mouth becomes painful the cats may stop eating and weight loss will often lead to other health issues.

Finally, bacterial issues that start in the mouth can lead to problems with major organs, including the liver and kidneys. Regular preventive dental care is an essential element to keep cats with FeLV healthy and well.

Most cats thrive on established routines and do not do well in a high-stress, fast-paced environment with lots of people or animals moving in and out of the home. Whenever possible, try to reduce stress in your FeLV-positive cat's environment.

Can an FeLV-positive cat live with a cat that does not have FeLV?

Housing FeLV-negative cats and FeLV-positive cats together in the same space is not recommended. They can certainly live in the same home or building but most medical experts believe it is best not to mix FeLV-positive cats with FeLV-negative cats.



ANTON HAS BOTH FELV AND FIV DISEASE.

How can I keep other cats from contracting FeLV?

The best way to prevent the spread of the virus is to keep FeLV-positive cats separate from FeLV-negative cats.

Isn't there a vaccine for FeLV?

Yes, there is a vaccine. But no vaccine is 100% effective.

How is the virus spread? How do cats get infected with FeLV?

Close, direct contact with an infected cat is how the virus most commonly spreads. Higher concentrations of the virus are found in saliva and some small amounts are also present in the blood, urine and feces of infected cats. Most often the virus is transmitted through shared food and water bowls, or one cat biting or licking another. It may also be transmitted during breeding. A kitten can contract it in utero and from the milk of its mother. It might be transferred from a litterbox. Though uncommon, it may also spread through fleas, blood transfusions or contaminated needles.

How can I be sure I'm not spreading the virus?

The virus does not live long outside a cat's body. Common household cleaners easily kill the virus and washing your hands with soap and water will too. It is unlikely that you would spread FeLV via clothing or your hands. To be safe, food and water bowls and anything that could have saliva on it should be washed well with soap and water.

How is feline leukemia diagnosed?

Blood tests are used to determine if a cat is negative or positive for the leukemia virus. First an ELISA (enzyme-linked Immunosorbent assay) test will be completed at a veterinarian's office. A positive ELISA test means that the virus is circulating in the cat's blood; it does not mean the cat will be permanently infected. The cat's immune system may be able to fight off the disease.

If the ELISA test is positive, a second test called an IFA (indirect immunofluorescent antibody assay) should be run; a positive IFA test indicates the cat's immune system was not able to repel the virus and that it has penetrated into the cat's bone marrow. At this stage, the cat's immune system will not be able to get rid of the virus, the cat has FeLV and always will.

*excerpted from Best Friends "FAQs about Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)"