



FeLV & FIV: !

What Every Cat Owner Needs to Know

Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) are two serious, contagious retroviruses that can significantly compromise a cat's immune system and health. They only affect cats and **cannot be transmitted to humans, dogs, or other non-feline animals.**



Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)

FeLV is highly contagious and is often referred to as the "friendly cat disease" because it spreads through social interaction.

- **Typical Symptoms**
 - Persistent diarrhea and vomiting.
 - Pale or yellowed gums (anemia or jaundice).
 - Chronic skin, bladder, or respiratory infections.
 - Significant weight loss and loss of appetite.
 - Poor coat condition (dull or matted fur).
 - Enlarged lymph nodes and persistent fever.
- **When They Get It**
 - **Kittens:** Most susceptible due to their developing immune systems.
 - **Young Adults:** High risk if they live in multi-cat households or go outdoors.
- **How It's Transmitted**
 - **Social Contact:** Mutual grooming, sharing food/water bowls, and sharing litter boxes.
 - **Bodily Fluids:** Primarily through saliva, but also found in nasal secretions, urine, and feces.
 - **Birth/Nursing:** From an infected mother to her kittens (the most common route for kittens).
 - **Bites:** Fighting can spread it, though less common than social grooming.

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)

FIV is a slow-acting virus often called the "fighting cat disease" because it typically requires a deep puncture wound to spread.

- **Typical Symptoms**
 - Severe inflammation of the mouth and gums (stomatitis/gingivitis).
 - Recurrent fevers that don't respond well to treatment.
 - Chronic "unwellness" (lethargy and hidden infections).
 - Slow-healing wounds or abscesses.
 - Neurological changes (behavioral shifts or seizures).
 - Increased risk of certain cancers, like lymphoma.
- **When They Get It**
 - **Adult Males:** Un-neutered outdoor males are the highest risk group due to territorial fighting.
 - **Older Cats:** Often diagnosed later in life after the virus has been dormant for years.
- **How It's Transmitted**
 - **Deep Bite Wounds:** The primary route; saliva must enter the bloodstream through a puncture.
 - **Blood-to-Blood:** Rarely via blood transfusions or unsterilized medical equipment.
 - **Maternal (Rare):** Unlike FeLV, it is much less common for a mother to pass FIV to kittens unless she is newly infected during pregnancy.
 - **Note:** It is generally *not* spread through casual contact like grooming or sharing bowls.

Prevention & Management

- **Testing is Crucial:** All new kittens and newly acquired cats should be tested for both FeLV and FIV before being introduced to a multi-cat household. Any cat that becomes ill or has been exposed to an infected cat should also be tested.
- **Keep Cats Indoors:** This is the **single most effective way** to prevent both infections, as it eliminates exposure to infected cats outside.
- **Vaccination (FeLV):** An FeLV vaccine is available and is highly recommended for all kittens and cats that go outdoors or live with an FeLV-positive cat. Discuss the FeLV vaccine with your veterinarian.
- **Spay/Neuter:** Reduces aggressive behaviors (fighting) which is the primary route for FIV transmission.

If your cat tests positive for FeLV or FIV: They can still live a happy life! You will need to keep them indoors, monitor them closely, and ensure they have frequent veterinary visits to catch and treat any secondary infections immediately.