



Feline Leukemia Virus

Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) is a very fatal contagious disease of cats. It is responsible for causing more illness and death in cats than any other single disease. The virus is present in the urine, saliva, tears and blood of affected cats. This allows transmission of the virus from cat to cat by grooming, fighting, shared food/water bowls, shared litter boxes, and from mother to kittens during pregnancy or in the milk after birth.

Cats or kittens that are most susceptible to FeLV are those less than 4 months of age or those that are suffering from another illness. Cats that are allowed outdoors are at a greater risk of being exposed to the virus directly from another cat or from environmental presence of the virus.

Not all cats that are exposed to the virus will acquire the disease. In general, about 30% of the cats with prolonged exposure to the virus will actually develop the disease and subsequently die. Survival time can vary, but 2 years is an average depending on other health factors.

The signs of a cat with leukemia can be vague. At first they may have no symptoms at all. Eventually there may be unexplained weight loss, anorexia, depression, fever or other recurrent illnesses. Clinically, they can become anemic, develop cancer or succumb to an overwhelming infection as well as a host of other problems.

There is a vaccine to protect against FeLV. While no vaccine is 100% effective, the available vaccination does tremendously reduce the risk of contracting the disease. We recommend that all new cats or kittens receive the initial vaccination series followed by a booster a year later. Prior to starting the vaccination series, we strongly recommend that all new cats or kittens be tested at adoption and again 3 months later. Vaccination does not interfere with testing. Vaccination should be continued throughout adulthood for any cat that goes outdoors or lives with an indoor/outdoor cat. If the cat will be a strictly indoor cat, then vaccination can be discontinued unless there is a change in the household or lifestyle of the cat.

Feline Leukemia Virus is a deadly disease, but with proper screening tests, appropriate vaccinations and a healthy lifestyle you can protect your favorite friends.