

# **FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS**

The Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) is also called the Feline AIDS Virus. It is NOT the same virus as that causing human HIV. It is called “AIDS” in the cat because of its similarities in how it affects the cat as compared to the human virus. Most all viruses are “host specific” which means they do not infect more than one species of animal (including man). ***The AIDS virus affects only humans and the FIV virus affects ONLY cats!***

**FIV in cats is spread through cat fight bites.** Other contact, such as eating or drinking out of the same bowl has not been shown to transmit the disease.

**A diagnosis is made with a blood test.** A positive test means the cat has been *EXPOSED* to the virus and will likely be infected for the remainder of its life. A negative cat means either the cat has not been exposed, or that exposure has occurred so recently that antibodies have not had time to develop in the cat after exposure. As a rule, it requires 4-6 weeks for the cat to develop an antibody level after exposure that can be detected using the blood test.

**TESTING KITTENS.** The test is not accurate in kittens under 4-6 months of age. A positive antibody test result in younger kittens simply means it is detecting antibody in the kitten’s blood that it received from its mother while nursing. Any positive test performed on pets less than 6 months of age should have a confirmation test performed at 6 months of age or older. If that second test is also positive, then it can be assumed the kitten is infected. If the second test is negative, there is nothing to worry about.

**Clinical signs may not develop for long periods of time after exposure—up to 6 years.** For this reason, the disease is most often diagnosed in the older adult pet.

**Clinical signs usually are simply a failure to respond to treatment for other conditions.** Severe gum infections and respiratory infections are common. Cats that are “poor-doers” are common. Treatment-resistant diarrhea is sometimes seen.

***THERE IS NO CURE FOR FELINE AIDS.*** There are, however, newer medications that can be used to boost the cat’s immune system helping prolong its quality life. However, the virus will remain in the cat and often reappears at a later time.

*FIV positive cats should not come in contact with other cats to minimize the spread of the disease.* Euthanasia of a positive cat is NOT NECESSARY as long as the cat is kept in the house and as stress-free as possible to minimize the chances of another infection developing to which the cat will not be able to respond due to FIV infection.

The prognosis is **NOT GOOD** for the long-term.