

FELINE INFECTIOUS ANEMIA

Feline Infectious Anemia is a disease caused by a microscopic parasite (*Hemobartonella felis*) that attaches to the red blood cells (erythrocytes). The affected red blood cells are then detected by the pet's immune system, which destroys those particular erythrocytes causing anemia.

Signs of the disease are a result of the anemia. Signs may include depression, weakness, loss of appetite, emaciation, fever, and jaundice (yellowish discoloration of mucous membranes). In the early stages, the disease is cyclic—with the cat having “good days” and “bad days.” As the disease progresses, there become more “bad days” than “good days.”

Transmission of the disease is not known for sure at this time. It is thought that it is spread from one cat to another by insects that carry blood, such as fleas, ticks, and mosquitoes. However, none of this has been proven as of yet.

Diagnosis is made from microscopic analysis of a blood sample. Unfortunately the parasite cannot always be found in a particular blood sample. Several samples may be required before a positive diagnosis can be made. The parasite may be found in cats not showing signs of the disease. Debilitation and stress are thought to be the “trigger” allowing the disease to progress. Feline leukemia is found in about 20% of FIA cats. Therefore suspect cases should also be tested for feline leukemia virus.

Treatment is very successful unless the cat has progressed to the very late stages of the disease. IV injections and oral antibiotics are usually effective. Blood transfusions may be required if severe anemia exists.

Some treatments merely suppress the disease and do not rid the cat of it. Therefore relapses may occur at a later date. Recovered cats may be carriers for life.

Prevention of the disease should include:

1. Feeding high quality foods
2. Preventing flea & tick infestation
3. Maintaining current vaccinations
4. Keeping the cat inside
5. Treating other illnesses promptly