

## **felv positive cats**

### ***What is Feline Leukemia Virus?***

Feline leukemia virus or FeLV is the cause of a variety of diseases. It belongs to the family of retroviruses which have the ability to insert themselves into the host's DNA where it invades and replicates in the cells of the cat's immune system and bone marrow. This makes it impossible to cure. FeLV affects only cats. People and dogs can not contract this virus.

### ***How common is FeLV?***

FeLV is found worldwide in approximately 2% of the cat population. Infection is more common in colonies of cats where there is close contact between individuals

### ***How is FeLV transmitted?***

FeLV is shed in bodily fluids such as saliva, urine or feces. However, FeLV is not a highly contagious virus as the virus can not live very long outside of the body. This means that if you pet a cat with FeLV and then pet another cat, the risk of transmission is essentially zero.

Transmission requires a prolonged period of close contact between infected cats and susceptible cats such as kittens and adults with weakened immune systems. Cat bites by an infected cat can readily transmit FeLV. Close contact activities including mating, mutual grooming and sharing of litter boxes and food bowls have been shown to lead to transmission over long periods of time.

The primary mode of transmission is from mother to kitten either before they are born or while they are nursing. It is thought that most positive cats were infected at or near birth as healthy, adult cats are essentially immune to the virus.

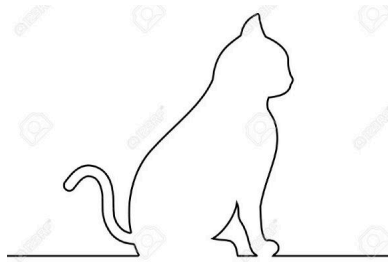
### ***What diseases does the virus cause?***

In many cats, FeLV infection results in a suppression of the immune system. This means that the cats is less able to defend itself against a wide variety of infections that would not normally cause a problem in healthy cats. A variety of symptoms could develop and there is a progressive deterioration in their health over time. However a FeLV positive cat can live for many years without illness.

FeLV can cause diseases that effect the gastro-intestinal tract and cause chronic diarrhea and vomiting, as well as eye disease and stomatitis (painful inflammation of the mouth). It may

also may cause a cancer called Lymphoma. Secondary infections are common due to a weakened immune system - wounds and other infections that don't resolve with normal treatment should rouse suspicion that FeLV infection be considered as a cause.

\* Credit to Tree House Humane Society



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### ***How do I know if my cat is showing signs of FeLV?***

There are many potential issues that FeLV cats can develop, so owners should be aware of their cat's normal behaviors and bring them to the vet right away if anything changes. If your cat becomes ill this does not mean it can not be treated. Most secondary infections due to the virus are treatable.

Some common symptoms of illness include:

- Lethargy, or a decrease in normal activity
- Decreased appetite
- Frequent sneezing or coughing
- Chronic diarrhea
- Changes in clarity of eyes
- Lumps on or under the skin
- Non healing wounds or unresolved infections

### ***How can I keep my FeLV cat healthy?***

It's important to protect your FeLV cat from other infectious diseases that may not be easily overcome due to their weakened immune system. Therefore, keep your cats indoors and up to date on routine vaccinations and parasite control. It is important to have regular (every 6 months) check ups by a veterinarian and to seek veterinary care immediately when you notice that he/she is not feeling well. Stay away from raw diets and feed a high quality food and minimize stressors that can impact their immune system.

### ***How long will my FeLV cat live?***

Although many FeLV cats live shorter lives, they will have several great years in their new home.

Sadly, 3 out of every 4 cats will need to be euthanized 3 years after diagnosis, but each cat is different. Many of our partners report FeLV cats living several years. Eventually, when your cat becomes ill and there is no effective treatment, you will discuss with your veterinarian when it is time to say goodbye.

### ***I'm conflicted, should I adopt?***

In a recent study conducted by Austin Pets Alive **95% of adopters had a positive experience and the overall impact the FeLV cat has had on their life was positive.** 73% would adopt another cat despite having a shorter life span and there was a great sense of pride that they adopted a special needs cat.

**However, keep in mind that you must be prepared to provide routine veterinary care to these cats which will have financial implications especially if chronic issues develop.**

FeLV positive cats have a longer survival time outside of a shelter environment and inside a loving, adopted home.