



## FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS (FIV)

### WHAT IS FIV?

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FIV is a cat specific retrovirus in the same family as human HIV. FIV may cause a compromise to the cat's immune system possibly leading to an inability to fight off infections and predispose them to cancer. It does not affect humans or other species. While there is no cure, a cat can be infected for quite some time before, if ever, developing any illness.

### HOW COMMON IS FIV?

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Although it can affect any cat, adult, free-roaming, intact male cats have a higher incidence. Less than 3% of all cats nation-wide are infected.

### HOW IS IT SPREAD?

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FIV is shed in high concentrations in the cat's saliva and therefore the main route of transmission is through deep bite wounds. It is rarely spread through casual contact and cats may co-habitate for years without viral transmission. The virus is not very durable in the environment and does not live long outside the body of the cat, so food and water bowls are not thought to be implicated in cross infection.

### WHAT DOES FIV DO TO THE CAT?

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Cats with FIV can live for a number of years without developing clinical signs and can live a normal lifespan. Because it may eventually affect the immune system, symptoms seen with progressive disease are usually due to infections or cancers that the cat can no longer ward off. This can lead to chronic health issues involving the teeth and gums, respiratory and skin diseases and life-threatening anemia.

### IS THERE A CURE?

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No. But, there are several strategies for keeping these cats healthy for years. FIV+ cats should remain indoors to prevent exposure to infectious diseases. Feeding high quality diets, avoiding un-cooked food and raw foods, and minimizing stress by engaging your cat in a routine and stable home will help to prevent flare-ups. Regular vet visits are needed to assess internal fitness and oral health.

### SHOULD YOU ADOPT THIS CAT?

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You should highly consider it! The life expectancy of FIV+ cats is significantly reduced in a shelter environment. These cats need the stability of a loving, preferably single-cat household. If you currently have a cat at home, please speak to your veterinarian regarding adding a FIV+ cat to your clan.



## Check List for Counseling Potential Adopters of FIV+ Cats

- FIV is spread almost exclusively through deep, penetrating bite wounds from serious fighting. It is not spread through casual non-aggressive contact between cats or by swatting/scratching. Introductions to current or future resident cats should be handled carefully and slowly. Ensure adopters are prepared for introductions and that they recognize the potential risk if serious fighting occurs.
- FIV-positive cats typically require more frequent dental cleanings and extractions than FIV-negative cats. They are also more vulnerable to skin problems, infections, and certain types of cancer. FIV-positive cats should receive veterinary exams twice per year. Adopters should be particularly alert to any signs of illness and consult a veterinarian as appropriate. FIV-positive cats may live long, healthy lives, but life expectancy varies
- FIV-positive cats are also more susceptible to stress-related illness. Owners should take reasonable steps to reduce potential stress during events like remodeling, moving, and other household changes.
- Preventive care is particularly important. FIV-positive cats should eat a healthy diet (raw diets not recommended) and adopters should follow their veterinarian's advice about vaccines and parasite prevention.
- Private practice veterinarians vary widely in their knowledge about FIV and their approach to treating FIV-positive cats. CAT encourages adopters to develop a relationship with a veterinarian who is experienced with and knowledgeable about FIV
- The outdoors is especially dangerous for an FIV-positive cat because of the exposure to diseases and other dangers. A virus or parasite that another cat might effectively fight off could make an FIV-positive cat seriously ill. FIV-positive cats should be kept indoors
- ACC offers a Wellness Certificate free with all adoptions compliments of our VCA partners. Review certificate in detail with adopters.