

Feline Leukemia Virus



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 **MSD**
Animal Health



Understanding the disease

Also known as FeLV, feline leukemia virus is one of the most common diseases in cats. FeLV weakens a cat's immune system, so it is less able to defend itself from other infections, which can lead to many serious and potentially fatal health conditions.

Cats at greatest risk of infection:



YOUNG CATS AND KITTENS



CATS THAT GO OUTDOORS



CATS LIVING IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH AN INFECTED CAT

How do cats become infected with FeLV?

FeLV is spread by contact with the bodily fluids of an infected cat—primarily saliva and urine.

Most often, FeLV is spread through mutual grooming, bites, shared food, shared water, or shared litter trays. FeLV can also spread through contact between a mother and her kittens, even before her kittens are born.

Newly infected cats may show few or no signs. Over time, FeLV can lead to cancer, severe blood disorders, and various infections associated with a weakened immune system.

FeLV ONLY INFECTS CATS, not people or other animals. ●



Know the signs

Some cats will have no signs of illness initially, but their health will gradually become worse over weeks, months, or even years.

Common signs include:



- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Diarrhea
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Pale or inflamed gums

How is FeLV infection diagnosed?

Veterinarians can determine if a cat is infected with FeLV by performing a simple blood test. Many infected cats show no signs of disease. Testing is often the only way to determine if a cat is infected with FeLV.

Which cats should be tested?

- All cats at least once
- All kittens
- Any new cat brought into a household with other cats
- Sick cats
- Cats with signs of FeLV-associated disorders, such as cancer, anemia, and immune disease
- Cats exposed to FeLV
- Cats with high-risk lifestyles
- Before cats are vaccinated



The risks are real

My cat...

- Is a kitten
- Goes outside
- Fights with other cats
- Is frequently exposed to new cats
- Has close contact with other cats

If any of these apply to your cat, talk to your veterinarian about preventive measures like vaccination that can help protect your cat from FeLV infection.

What if my cat becomes infected?

Good care can help keep your cat feeling well for a long time. A nutritious diet is very important. Also, cats should be kept indoors and be spayed or neutered to protect them from exposure to other diseases and reduce stress. Twice-yearly veterinary visits will help ensure FeLV-infected cats get the care they need.

Cats with persistent FeLV infection may live for several years, but their overall life expectancy is decreased compared with uninfected cats.

How can I protect my cat from FeLV infection?

Avoid contact with cats that might be infected with FeLV. For cats at high risk of exposure, effective FeLV vaccines are available. Your veterinarian can help determine whether your cat should be vaccinated against FeLV.

Is vaccination against FeLV safe?

Cats have been vaccinated against FeLV for many years, and while minor side effects do occur, the vaccines are generally safe and well tolerated. Injections given to cats, including the FeLV vaccine, have the potential to cause tumors at the injection site, but this is very rare. The benefits of protecting a cat against the serious, deadly disease associated with FeLV infection usually outweigh the risks of vaccination.

There is an FeLV vaccine now available that only requires a booster every 2 years instead of annually. This means maintaining your cat's protection against FeLV is easier than ever.

FeLV Protection Checklist

- 1 Avoid contact with other cats that could be infected with FeLV.
- 2 Have any new cats tested for FeLV before bringing them into your household.
- 3 Be aware of risks your cat might encounter due to his or her lifestyle and discuss any lifestyle changes with your veterinarian.
- 4 Watch for signs of FeLV, such as fever, loss of appetite, weight loss, or diarrhea.
- 5 Have your veterinarian check for signs of FeLV, such as swollen lymph nodes and pale or inflamed gums.

Talk to your veterinarian...

if you have further questions about FeLV infection and about vaccinating your cat, today.

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