



- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Diarrhoea
- Lethargy
- Swollen lymph nodes

As the disease progresses, other symptoms may occur such as:

- Weight loss
- Sores in and around the mouth
- Eye lesions
- Poor coat
- Chronic infections

Eventually the immune system becomes too weak to fight off other infections or diseases. As a result, the cat will die from one of these subsequent infections.

## HOW IS FIV CONTRACTED?

Because FIV is shed in high levels in saliva, FIV is spread from cat to cat primarily through bite wounds. Because biting is the most efficient means of viral transmission, free-roaming, aggressive male cats are the most frequently infected, while cats housed exclusively indoors are much less likely to be infected.

On rare occasions infection is transmitted from an infected mother cat to her kittens, usually during passage through the birth canal or when the new born kittens ingest infected milk.

- \* Sexual contact is not a major means of spreading FIV. The spread of FIV through water bowls or grooming/licking is unlikely.

# FIV

## Feline Immunodeficiency Virus

### WHAT IS FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS?

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus, or FIV, is often referred to as Feline AIDS. FIV causes a potentially fatal viral disease that interferes with the immune system of a cat.

The virus lives in the blood of the infected cat and is carried in its system throughout its life.

Cats infected with FIV may remain healthy for up to 10 years. While some infected cats show no signs of the disease, others may display initial symptoms such as:



New Zealand has extremely high rates of FIV infection.

## HOW IS FIV DIAGNOSED?

Common diseases cats develop with FIV infection include oral infections, chronic skin, urinary tract and respiratory tract infections. These will alert your veterinarian to the possibility of FIV, and they will recommend a test.

Most of the time FIV is discovered using a screening test done in the clinic, called a RAPID test, or SNAP test, or when blood is sent to a commercial laboratory.

- \* It is important to note that a cat vaccinated against FIV will test positive for FIV.



## FIV VACCINE

Vaccines to help protect against FIV infection are now available. However, not all vaccinated cats will be protected by the vaccine (efficacy is reported to be up to 82%), so preventing exposure will remain important, even for vaccinated pets. In addition, vaccination may have an impact on future FIV test results - vaccinated cats will test positive. It is important that you discuss the advantages and disadvantages of vaccination with your veterinarian to help you decide whether FIV vaccines should be administered to your cat.

## PREVENTING FIV

The only sure way to protect cats is to prevent their exposure to the virus. Cat bites are a major way infection is transmitted, so keeping cats indoors and away from potentially infected cats that might bite them - markedly reduces their likelihood of contracting FIV infection. For the safety of the resident cats, only infection-free cats should be adopted into a household with uninfected cats.

## MY CAT HAS BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH FIV - WHAT SHOULD I DO?

FIV-infected cats should ideally be confined indoors to prevent spread of FIV infection to other cats in the

neighbourhood and to reduce their exposure to infectious agents carried by other animals.

FIV-infected cats should be spayed or neutered.

They should be fed nutritionally complete and balanced diets. Uncooked food, such as raw meat and eggs, and unpasteurized dairy products should not be fed to FIV-infected cats because the risk of food-borne bacterial and parasitic infections is much higher in immunosuppressed cats.

Wellness visits for FIV-infected cats should be scheduled with your veterinarian at least every six months. Although a detailed physical examination of all body systems will be performed, your veterinarian will pay special attention to the health of the gums, eyes, skin, and lymph nodes. Your cat's weight will be measured accurately and recorded, because weight loss is often the first sign of deterioration. Blood tests should be performed at least annually.

Vigilance and close monitoring of the health and behaviour of FIV-infected cats is even more important than it is for uninfected cats. Alert your veterinarian to any changes in your cat's health as soon as possible.

## I HAVE OTHER CATS AS WELL...

Unfortunately many FIV-infected cats are not diagnosed until after they have lived for years with other cats. In such cases, all the other cats in the household should be tested. Ideally, all infected cats should be separated from the non-infected ones to eliminate the potential for FIV transmission. If this is not possible-and if fighting or rough play is not taking place-the risk to the non-infected cats appears to be low.