

FACTSHEET

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (Feline AIDS)

What is it?

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (also known as Feline AIDS) attacks a cat's T-cells. These cells are important in helping the body fight off disease. Once the T-cells start to decline in the body, the cat is open to secondary infections. **FIV cannot be transmitted to humans from cats.**

FIV is present in the saliva of infected cats and the main route of transmission is by bite wounds. Adult undesexed male free-roaming cats are the highest risk group for infection of the virus – and contact with those cats puts other cats at high risk.

Prevention is best

The single most effective way to prevent FIV in your cats is to keep them indoors at all times, or indoors with strictly supervised outdoor times in a secure yard.

If your cats are allowed outside, try to cat-proof fence your garden or an outdoor enclosure, so that other cats cannot enter the property and your cat cannot leave it.

Ensure your cat is desexed as this will reduce the risk of your cat getting into fights, and **always** curfew your cat indoors at night.

These strategies will also prevent your cat from contracting many other diseases that can be carried by stray or neighbourhood cats.

Vaccines are available but they don't guarantee immunity. You need to specially request this vaccination as it is not a part of the standard vaccination schedule. Decisions about vaccination should always be made in consultation with your vet.

What are the symptoms?

FIV can go undetected in cats for a long time, until secondary infections occur. Some signs that may indicate FIV are:

- Lethargy
- Weight loss
- Loss of appetite
- Swollen lymph glands
- Gum disease
- Diarrhoea
- Skin infections
- Respiratory infections

- Urinary infections

If your cat has any of these symptoms, you should consult your vet immediately.

Your vet can do a simple blood test to check whether your cat has FIV. However, if your cat has been previously vaccinated against FIV, then the cat might test positive owing to the presence of the vaccine rather than the actual virus. If you don't know the full history of your cat, it can be difficult to determine whether the test is actually positive or a false positive. A series of tests might be required.

What do I do if my cat has FIV?

Although cats with FIV can live long and happy lives, it is extremely important that they are not allowed to go outside or be in contact with other cats.

If your cat has FIV you will need to:

- Keep your cat indoors to prevent them infecting other cats and also to protect them from other diseases. With a compromised immune system, even a common condition such as cat flu can be fatal
- Don't feed your cat raw meat or chicken
- Feed a nutritionally complete and balanced diet
- Take them for regular checkups with your vet
- If you have any other cats you will need to have them tested. If they don't have FIV, you will need to consider whether to keep them separate from the cat with FIV. Separation will prevent transmission of FIV from the infected cat, however, if the cats are strongly bonded such a decision may be contrary to the needs of the cat/s. You will have to discuss the situation in depth with your vet and understand all the risks before making a decision
- Ensure the cat is desexed
- Be prepared. Keep an eye on your cat's eating and toileting habits, as well as looking out for signs of illness. As the cat's immune system is poor, they can become ill very easily

FIV is a very serious condition with health impacts for the wider feline population.

Careful and close management is essential to mitigating the risk and spread of FIV. If you think your cat may have been exposed to an infected cat or you have any concerns that your cat may have FIV please see your vet immediately.

While all care has been taken in preparing this document, it is intended to provide general information only and should not be taken as constituting professional advice. Mention of a product or business does not mean endorsement by Cat Protection.