



FAQs About FIV

What is FIV?

FIV stands for feline immunodeficiency virus. It is in the same class as the HIV virus. FIV, which can live in many different tissues in cats, typically weakens a cat's immune system.

How do cats get FIV?

One of the tissues where FIV lives is the salivary glands, so the most common route of infection is a deep bite wound from an FIV-positive cat to another cat. It can also be transmitted via blood, in utero and from milk from an infected mother cat. It is very rare for cats to get FIV from being around or sharing food bowls with infected cats. It's also rare for a cat to get the virus after being touched by someone who touched an infected cat.

What are the signs of FIV infection?

There are no specific signs of FIV infection, but FIV-positive cats have weaker immune systems and are more prone to getting upper respiratory infections, ringworm, and dental disease. Other than that, FIV-positive cats tend to live long, happy lives.

How do I know if my cat has FIV?

Since there are no apparent signs of FIV, the only way to find out for sure if there's an infection is to do a blood test. The most common is a veterinarian-administered ELISA test (often called a SNAP test), which tests for FIV antibodies. An antibody is a protein made by the cat in response to FIV infection. A cat can test positive as soon as two to four weeks after exposure, but it can take up to eight weeks. Kittens under six months of age may test positive after receiving antibodies from their mothers, either in utero or via milk. It can take up to six months for these antibodies to go away. So, for that reason, it is a good idea to retest any kitten testing positive after reaching the age of six months.

Can FIV be treated?

There are no proven treatments to cure a cat of FIV. Most FIV-positive cats handle the disease well, but it is essential to concentrate on treating secondary illnesses.

What can be done to prevent the spread of FIV?

Cats should be kept indoors, so they do not fight with an FIV-positive cat. Depending on location, the rate of FIV-positive cats ranges from 4% to 24%. An FIV-positive cat can live with an FIV-negative cat as long as both are spayed or neutered. But they should not live together if either cat is a fighter or if the FIV-positive cat has no teeth. (FIV-positive cats commonly have severe dental disease, which means it is necessary to remove all their teeth.) There is a vaccine for FIV, but Best Friends does not recommend it because the vaccine does not have the best efficacy and, after a cat is vaccinated for FIV, the cat will test positive for the virus. At this point, no test can differentiate whether a cat tests positive for FIV from the vaccine or from having the infection. And sadly, if a cat tests positive for FIV and ends up in a shelter, he or she is more at risk of being killed.

Can FIV-negative and FIV-positive cats live together?

Yes, as long as the cats get along, are spayed or neutered and do not fight. They can safely share food bowls, water bowls and litter boxes as well as snuggle with each other. You can minimize the risk of an FIV-positive cat spreading the virus to an FIV-negative cat by having them live in separate rooms until you are confident that they will not fight with each other.

Can FIV-positive cats have a good and long life?

FIV-positive cats can live everyday lives both in quality and duration, but they need to be given special care that includes monitoring them for signs of infection (because they tend to have destructive dental disease).

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