



WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FIV AND FELV?!

All cats and kittens that come into the SPCA program are tested for FIV and FeLV by 4 weeks of age, but what does it mean if they are tested positive? This is a quick overview of FIV and FeLV and what it means in relation to fostering!

WHAT DO THE ABBREVIATIONS STAND FOR

FIV: Feline Immunodeficiency Virus is slow-acting and attacks a cat's immune system and weakens it making the cat susceptible to various secondary infections. Most cats can live a normal life span (~15 years) before it reaches the chronic stages as long as they stay indoors.

FeLV: Feline Leukemia Virus is a virus that infects cats and moderately to severely lowers their immune system. As an immune-suppressant virus, it can cause a variety of diseases in addition to leukemia. The average life span of a cat after diagnosis is 2-5 years even with routine vet care.



SIMILARITIES & DIFFERENCES

Both are viruses that are transmitted from cat to cat, which means humans and canines are not at risk. They are immune suppressant viruses where cats may not show any symptoms for months or years. The most common way to know if they are positive is with a combo FIV/FeLV test that looks for the presence of antibodies to the virus in the blood. No test is 100% accurate all of the time, and a veterinarian may need to do further testing based on the results. Kittens aren't considered a 'true' positive for either until they are ~6 months of age due to the possibility of a false positive from mom's anti-bodies.

Life expectancy is the main difference; a cat with FIV has a better chance at living a longer life than FeLV. There is a FeLV vaccine to help protect cats, but not for FIV.

TRANSMISSION

FIV is mainly passed from cat to cat through deep bite wounds, the kind that usually occur outdoors during aggressive fights and territorial disputes. Another, less common mode of transmission is from an FIV-infected mother cat to her kitten. FIV does not seem to be commonly spread through sharing food bowls and litter boxes, social grooming, sneezing and other casual modes of contact.

Direct contact between cats is the most frequent method of **FeLV** infection. The virus is fragile and cannot survive longer than a few hours outside of the cat. A cat with FeLV sheds a large quantity of the virus in its saliva, as well as in other bodily fluids such as nasal secretions, urine and feces. However, FeLV is not a highly contagious virus, and transmission generally requires a prolonged period of close contact between infected and susceptible cats. Close contact activities include mating, mutual grooming, and sharing of litter trays and food bowls. Cat bites by an infected cat can readily transmit infection.

FOSTER SET-UP & ADOPTION OUTLOOK

It's important to keep FIV and FeLV positive foster felines in their own room separate from personal cats mostly for the foster pet's health as they have a lower immune system and are more susceptible from picking up minor illnesses like URI. At the discretion of the SPCA medical team, they may receive an immune booster as part of their daily meals and may need frequent medical check-ins. Aside from making sure the foster areas are cleaned routinely and hands are washed in between handling personal pets and the foster felines, no additional care is needed.

In the past, these pets would be euthanized just because of a positive test, but these results can be false for kittens and some FeLV felines can live longer than 5yrs after diagnosis (our office cat, Patches, is living proof!) The SPCA believes that every feline should get a chance at a forever home and there are adopters that open up their hearts for these special felines!

For any further questions, please email the Foster Coordinator at abroughton@spcawake.org