

Feline Retroviruses: FeLV and FIV

What are FeLV and FIV?

FeLV and FIV are retroviruses that are specific to cats and are not contagious to humans or other animals. A retrovirus is simply a virus that uses a special way of replicating its DNA within the body. They are usually life-long diseases.

FIV stands for Feline Immunodeficiency Virus and is similar to HIV in people. The virus weakens the immune system and makes it easier for cats to become sick with other usually mild illnesses. If kept indoors, cats can live a relatively long and healthy life.

FeLV stands for Feline Leukemia Virus. This virus also weakens the immune system, and often leads to untreatable cancer or illness. The median lifespan from diagnosis is about 2.5 years, but these cats can live a happy life in a well cared for home in the meantime.

What are the clinical signs of FeLV/FIV?

Clinical Signs of FeLV and FIV

Key Chart

 FIV  FeLV



Photo Credit:

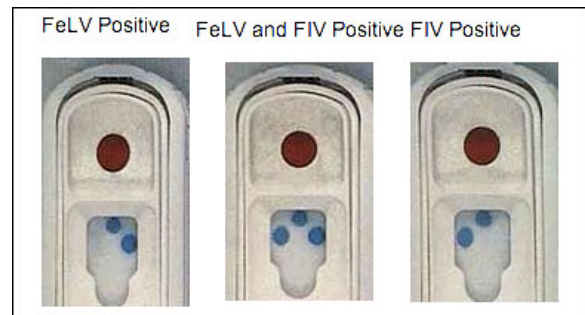
https://www.zoetisus.com/content/_assets/docs/PDFs/ZPN/Client-Guide-to-FeLV-and-FIV-DIA-00395.pdf

How are these diseases transmitted?

FIV is typically only spread through saliva via very deep bite wounds. There are rare reported cases of maternal-fetal transmission.

FeLV is much more easily spread as it can be transmitted through biting, but also grooming and sharing bedding, toys and bowls.

Who should be tested?



According to the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) testing should be performed on cats that are new to the home, sick cats or cats that have gotten outside. *AACACC follows standard shelter guidelines to not test a kitten under the age of 6 months old due to the potential for false positives and false negatives. However, there is a very low risk that this kitten could have contracted FeLV from its mom. Transmission of FIV from mother to kitten is very rare and new research suggests that this may not be possible at all. For this reason isolation and having your kitten tested with your primary care veterinarian after that age is recommended.* If you feel strongly about testing your kitten now, AACACC will still honor your request. The cost of testing at AACACC is \$40, which is typically significantly less expensive than having it done elsewhere.

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Your primary care veterinarian may recommend testing twice if you adopt a kitten (once as a kitten and again after 6 months of age). Your primary care veterinarian may also recommend testing an adult cat with possible exposure 6 months after their first test to ensure that they have not become positive in that time as delayed infections can occur. Lastly, testing is usually required prior to starting the FeLV vaccine series.

Is there any prevention from these viruses?

Currently there is not a licensed vaccine for FIV in the US.

There are vaccines to protect against FeLV in the US. AAFP recommends that all cats have the initial series at least once in their lifetime and then be continued based on their exposure. The initial series is to protect them in the event that they get outside and are exposed to the virus.

If you have a positive cat at home the main recommendations are to keep them up to date with veterinary care, keep them indoors only and ensure that they are spayed and neutered. If they are showing any signs of illness they should be evaluated by a veterinarian immediately as early treatment is more effective than waiting.

Can you safely introduce a positive cat into your home with other cats?

Generally speaking, it is quite safe to introduce an **FIV-positive** cat in a home with FIV-negative cats. A 2014 study from Purdue showed that transmission between FIV-positive cats and FIV-negative cats did not occur in a community shelter setting. As long as the cats get along and there is no

biting involved, everyone can continue to live a happy healthy life together.

Since **FeLV** is much more easily transmitted through surfaces and grooming, there is a significantly higher risk of your FeLV-negative cat contracting the disease if you introduce them to an FeLV-positive cat. For this reason we recommend that FeLV-positive cats live only with other FeLV-positive cats or by themselves.



For more information please visit these websites:

<https://www.vet.cornell.edu/departments-centers-and-institutes/cornell-feline-health-center/health-information/feline-health-topics/feline-leukemia-virus-brochure>

<https://www.vet.cornell.edu/departments-centers-and-institutes/cornell-feline-health-center/health-information/feline-health-topics/feline-immunodeficiency-virus-fiv>

<https://catvets.com/public/PDFs/ClientBrochures/AAFPFeLV-FIV-Brochure.pdf>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1090023314000847>