



FIV Facts Sheet

What is FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus)?

FIV is a lentivirus, a slow-progressing virus that can compromise a cat's immune system, reducing its ability to fight off illnesses. The virus has a long latent period then progresses so slowly that it may **never** affect a cat. That's why long-term studies show what guardians and rescuers have known for decades—that FIV cats can live just as long and as healthy, and ultimately die of the same causes as Non-FIV cats. And, FIV cats can live with Non-FIV cats without spreading the virus.

FIV is a rare virus affecting an estimated 2-3% of cats in the U.S. and 3-4% worldwide. For healthy, domesticated, indoor cats, the percentage is even lower.

Photo: CoCo, FIV Cat Rescue Sanctuary

How is FIV transmitted?

FIV is difficult to spread. The virus is fragile and does not survive long in the environment. It is killed by air, light, heat and regular household disinfectants.

FIV is primarily transmitted through a deep, penetrating bite (FIV cat to Non-FIV cat) where the virus (in the saliva) is injected directly into the bloodstream of the Non-FIV cat. Bites of this kind are extremely rare, except in free-roaming, un-neutered tomcats.

It can also be spread through blood transfusions (very rare since a Veterinarian would not use an FIV cat to give blood to a Non-FIV cat).

Kittens rarely get it from their mothers. Some inherit their Mom's antibodies (the good guys that fight the virus) so kittens testing positive should be retested between 6 and 8 months of age, at which time most will test negative. Which means they never had the virus, just the antibodies from Mom.

FIV is **not** passed through open wounds. And, FIV is **not** passed casually such as in sharing of food or water dishes or toys, mutual grooming, snuggling, mock fighting, shared litter boxes, scratches, not even sneezes. You can cuddle FIV and Non-FIV cats at the same time and not spread the virus.

Can FIV cats live with other cats?

Yes, FIV cats can live with both FIV and Non-FIV cats without spreading the virus as long as all are non-aggressive. This is usually a matter of introducing cats SLOWLY. Any time a new cat is added to a household, there should be a slow introductory period whether cats are FIV or Non-FIV.

FIV cats can live just as long and as healthy as Non-FIV cats.
FIV cats can live with Non-FIV cats without spreading the virus.

Can my kids or other animals catch FIV?

NO. FIV is a feline disease. There is no evidence FIV can be transmitted to humans or other mammals.

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How is a cat tested for FIV?

A simple blood test called ELISA looks for *antibodies* to FIV. However, due to many false results, if a cat tests positive, it should be retested using an IDEXX PCR test. (The PCR looks for the actual *virus* itself.)

Is there a cure or treatment for FIV?

No. There are actually no cures for any of the thousands of viruses in cats or humans, and no specific treatments for FIV except good care (see below: *Do FIV cats need special Care?*)

Is there a vaccine?

A vaccine was created. However, it is no longer available in the US because it did not work for all strains of the virus. Also, the screening tests cannot tell the difference between a vaccinated cat and one that has the virus. So if a vaccinated cat was lost and ended up at a shelter, the cat could lose its life because some shelters routinely “euthanize” FIV cats as unadoptable. (Thankfully, more people running shelters now know that FIV cats are just cats and they are finding homes for them.)

Cats who have been vaccinated AGAINST FIV
Will test positive FOR FIV antibodies.
This leads to false readings all of their lives.

Is FIV the same as Feline AIDS?

Some people, including veterinarians, still use the misleading terminology that FIV=Feline AIDS. The facts are that FIV is **NOT** “Feline AIDS.” (Just as we have learned that HIV is **NOT** “AIDS” in people.) FIV is a slow-progressing virus that could (though rarely does) allow a disease to progress unchecked.

FIV is **NOT** “Feline AIDS”
Just as HIV is **NOT** “AIDS” in people.

How long can an FIV cat live?

Several long-term studies show what guardians and rescuers have known for decades, that cats can live as long, and as healthy as non-FIV cats and ultimately die of the same causes.

Do FIV cats need special care?

FIV cats have the same needs as Non-FIV cats. ALL cats should be neutered, live only with other non-aggressive cats, kept as healthy as possible, live in a safe environment (either indoor and/or outdoor cat-proofed area), stress levels kept down (all cats are hypersensitive), a quality diet (the best you can afford), regular vet exams, treat any health problems when they arise. And LOVE.

**This information is the current (May 2019) understanding of FIV.
As researchers learn more about this virus; the facts just keep getting better.**

For more detailed information, go to FIVCatRescue.org



FIV Cat Rescue
Educating | Advocating | Saving Lives

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