



Feline Leukemia

Twenty-five years ago, feline Leukemia was an unknown disease. Today, the virus is regarded as the leading non-traumatic cause of death in adult cats, killing as many as one in ten animals annually. The name "feline leukemia virus (FeLV)" gives merely a hint of just how much trouble this contagious virus can cause. Cats infected with the virus are also susceptible to feline infectious peritonitis, anemia, toxoplasmosis, kidney problems and lymphosarcoma. Still more common, though, are "associated diseases" that result when FeLV impairs a cat's immune system. Cats infected with FeLV have limited ability to resist other infections by even most common bacteria, viruses, and fungus. They also sustain frequent colds, stomach problems as well as skin and mouth sores.

The virus that causes feline leukemia was first identified in 1964. It is present in the saliva, feces and urine of infected cats and is transmitted by close contact between cats, such as licking, sneezing or biting. The virus enters a cat's body through the mucous membranes. It then moves to the bloodstream and eventually travels throughout the cat's system.

Certain groups of cats are considered at higher risk for developing feline leukemia than others. Cats that live in a multi-cat household and cats that are allowed to roam outdoors are those at greater risk of contracting the disease.

Warning sign of Feline Leukemia can include:

1. Poor appetite
2. Listlessness
3. Labored breathing
4. A persistent cough
5. Frequent vomiting
6. Fever
7. Swollen glands in the neck or abdomen

It is impossible to diagnose feline leukemia in a cat by observation alone. A blood or saliva test must be conducted to confirm the diagnosis.

What can you do to protect your cat from Feline Leukemia?

Three actions can help protect a cat against FeLV:

- Preventing the cat's exposure to other cats and thereby the virus (IE: Don't let your cat outdoors!)
- Have your cat tested for this virus. It takes only a few minutes and requires a small blood sample.
- Have your cat inoculated against the virus after a negative blood test. Prevention of FeLV infection is a hit-or-miss proposition; even the vaccination is not 100% fool-proof.