



Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)

FIV is NOT a mandatory death sentence.

It is important to realize that a positive test for FIV is not a mandatory death sentence. With a high protein diet and aggressive treatment of secondary infections, an FIV-positive cat can lead a reasonably normal life span. Dr. Mike Richards says, "Feline immunodeficiency virus infection does not lead to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome in cats as often as human immunodeficiency virus lead to AIDS in people." The largest threat to FIV-positive cats is secondary infections, such as bladder, skin, and upper respiratory infections. Kidney failure is also frequently seen in cats with FIV. These secondary infections should be treated promptly and aggressively in any cat, but especially with a FIV cat.

What is FIV and how is it transmitted?

FIV is a retrovirus in the same family as the human AIDS virus, with a few significant differences. It is estimated that in the United States, 2% of cats are infected with the FIV virus. Saliva to blood (biting) is generally accepted as the primary source of spreading the virus, and it is unlikely (but not impossible) that cats will spread FIV by drinking or eating out of the same food dish, or by mutual grooming. It is not surprising that outdoor cats are particularly susceptible to the virus, and the best way to prevent infection with FIV virus is to ensure that your cat stays indoors only, which eliminates the possibility of contact with other FIV cats. Another less common means of transmission is from the mother cat (Queen) to her kittens during gestation, during birth, or by nursing. There is comfort in the fact that not all FIV queens pass the virus on to their kittens. This phenomenon is not fully understood, but all kittens from FIV mothers should be tested for the FIV antibodies after six months.

What's next for a FIV diagnosis?

If your cat has been diagnosed as FIV-positive, you'll want to work very closely with your veterinarian in designing a management program. For cats with no other symptoms, and otherwise generally good health, this might simply be a matter of ensuring the cat gets a sound diet, possibly with added vitamins, anti-oxidants, and Omega 3/ Omega 6 fatty acids, as well as prompt, aggressive treatment of infections and other conditions as they crop up. Even flea control is important as fleas transmit a number of other parasites such as the Haemabartonella. Also, flea bites themselves can be infected which would be a cause for concern.

http://cats.about.com/cs/healthissues/a/fiv_in_cats.htm