

FIV cats – an overview (FIV stands for Feline Immunodeficiency Virus)

Knowing a cat has FIV makes very little difference to the cat or its owner's life.



How does FIV affect cats?

FIV gradually attacks the white blood cells of the immune system and *may eventually* make a cat less able to fight off infection. This is a very slow process and FIV cats often live as long as cats without FIV. Some FIV cats *may become* more vulnerable to secondary infections and they *may* need more dental work, but cats without FIV are also susceptible to these same ailments.

How do you know a cat has FIV? This is a tricky one...

- You can't tell by just looking at a cat. They don't know they have it, they have no symptoms & need no medication

How do cats get FIV?

Most research agrees that FIV is passed on through saliva from deep bites during mating or fighting. Even then, a lot of saliva needs to be injected straight into the bloodstream of the other cat, so the risk of passing it on is small. Bites of this kind generally only occur when cats live in crowded conditions, are short of food and not de-sexed. On very rare occasions FIV mothers can pass on the virus to their kittens.

Some simple facts about FIV

- FIV can only be spread from cat to cat in specific circumstances. It can't be spread to humans. The virus is fragile and only survives for a few seconds outside the body
- There is little evidence to say that FIV cats can't live happily & safely with other cats if they are all de-sexed, well-fed and introduced properly to one another - in fact having other cats around can improve their lives by reducing stress
- FIV *cannot* be passed on through mutual grooming, litter trays, food & water bowls, clothes, shoes or hands
- FIV cats get sick at the same rate as cats without FIV, and recent research has shown that they can live at least as long as other cats & sometimes longer (bear in mind all cats including those without FIV can die young from all sorts of other causes)
- Cats don't die from FIV. Many cats are asymptomatic their entire lives and pass away from unrelated ailments or old age

Caring for your FIV cat

- Advice varies on whether you should keep your FIV cat indoors
- Cats with FIV have the same chance as other cats to live long, healthy lives if they have a nutritious diet, are loved and are stress-free
- It's important to consult a vet when any cat is unwell. It is especially important be proactive if your FIV cat shows any signs of illness, as early treatment can prevent further problems. But even if your FIV cat has an infection, provided it is promptly treated and the cat is well cared for it can live for many years
- Whilst many FIV cats have good teeth their whole lives, it is not uncommon for them to have some tooth extractions and the health of their teeth must be closely monitored
- If your cat has FIV, it's important to find a vet who is knowledgeable and understanding about the virus as different vets hold different opinions. Some believe that FIV cats are not suitable for adoption; others believe they should be housed as only cats; some believe vaccinating against FIV is best; others disagree as they feel that it is not reliable and some vets are not concerned about it at all

Love is a powerful immune system enhancer so cherish your FIV cat