

## **Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) Fact Sheet**

- FeLV is found ONLY in cats. It can't infect humans, dogs, cattle, or anything else.
- FeLV isn't nearly as contagious as once thought. Only 2-3% of all cats have FeLV which means that 97-98% of cats don't have FeLV.
- Most FeLV is spread from queen to kitten in utero or through nursing. It's the blood-to-blood transmission through the umbilical cord that is the most efficient and effective means of FeLV virus transmission.
- FeLV can also be spread through deep bite wounds caused by adult cats fighting and mating. The saliva-to-blood transmission isn't as efficient or effective as the blood-to-blood transmission. Once cats are spayed/neutered, they generally don't do the kind of fighting that results in deep bite wounds, and they certainly aren't having kittens.
- FeLV can be spread by long term mutual grooming even in cats that have been fixed but it's rare.
- FeLV is a very fragile wimpy virus outside of the cat. It doesn't live long outside of the cat and is easily killed by the mildest of soaps and disinfectants or environmental factors like temperature and moisture.
- Transfers of the virus through food/water or litter are very rare. It's possible but not probable. The virus can get into food, water, and litter, but it's very difficult to go from there to the bloodstream of an uninfected cat.
- Spaying and neutering cats is the most effective tool to control the spread of FeLV. S/N substantially reduces the spread of FeLV and virtually stops the spread of FIV.
- The SNAP test is the most accurate of the point-of-care tests for FeLV. However, there is a high rate of false positives – up to 30%. Life and death of a cat should NEVER depend on a single test. A confirmation test should be performed.
- The Quantitative Real PCR Test from IDEXX, #26355, is the definitive confirmation test for FeLV. The qPCR is extremely accurate and there are 3 possible results: 1) Negative (abortive) 2) Positive – Regressively Infected or 3) Positive – Progressively Infected. The qPCR test #26355 also does a lab-controlled ELISA test to rule out a focal infection for FeLV. Ask for the qPCR by number as several tests have similar sounding names.
- If the qPCR is positive, it gives the viral load, a measure of how much virus is in the cat.
- If the viral load of a cat is 1 million or more copies of the virus per ml of blood, the cat is progressively infected with FeLV. If the viral load is less than that, the cat is regressively infected. Only the quantitative PCR test from IDEXX can give you the viral load.
- The IFA test is NOT recommended. The qPCR is more accurate than the IFA; it gives far more information including the viral load; and it's less expensive.

- Cats that are regressively infected with FeLV can live a normal life span as their immune systems are combating the virus naturally. Regressively infected cats aren't contagious to other cats, and they aren't shedding the virus.
- Progressively infected cats are more likely to develop FeLV related disease and have a shorter life span. They are contagious to other cats and they are shedding the virus. Progressively infected cats generally live about 1.2 years beyond diagnosis. Every cat's immune response to the virus is different. We see highly progressively infected cats that are healthy and thriving.
- The viral load can change over time as the immune response from the cat changes.
- Kittens can clear the virus. They have developing immune systems, and we never know when they will kick in and start doing what immune systems are supposed to do. Any young kitten that tests positive for FeLV needs to be tested again at 6 months of age. Generally, if a kitten is still positive at 6 months of age, he will stay positive.
- The risk of the FeLV virus spreading in a mixed household is reduced by getting the negative cats vaccinated against FeLV.
- Vaccines for FeLV are safe and effective. Merck makes the Nobivac 2 vaccine which is a 2-yr vaccine after the initial doses.
- The 2020 Guidelines for Cats with Retroviruses (FIV/FeLV) from the American Association of Feline Practitioners recommends adoption for FeLV+ cats, not euthanasia!
- FeLV+ cats should not be blood donors.
- Join Facebook group: Owners of FeLV+/FIV+ Cats
- Care for FeLV+ Cats: FeLV+ cats need a stress-free environment and a complete balanced diet. Don't feed raw! FeLV+ cats should see the vet at the first sign of illness, otherwise twice yearly.

AAFP FeLV/FIV Guidelines: 5 critical takeaways for your shelters: Dr. Julie Levy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vs7ycpPURnU>

Mixed Households: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yiljAptf9xg>