

FeLV: How to Protect Multi-Cat Homes

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PART 3 OF 3: FELINE LEUKEMIA

Protect against FeLV

IN MULTIPLE CAT HOMES

Feline leukemia (FeLV) is a major cause of illness in domestic cats. If you have multiple cats or are thinking of bringing a new cat or kitten into your household, it is a good idea to have all cats tested.



Outdoor cats, indoor/outdoor cats, and cats exposed to such individuals are at greatest risk of exposure to FeLV. Cats living in households with FeLV-infected cats or with cats of unknown infection status are also at risk.

TESTS FOR FELV

It is estimated that 2-3% of healthy cats are infected with FeLV. Approximately 1/4 to 1/2 of the healthy cats living in infected multi-cat households and catteries are infected.

There are two blood tests used to determine if a cat has FeLV. One is an ELISA (Enzyme-Linked Immuno-Sorbent Assay) test to determine whether a cat has been exposed to the virus. The second is an IFA (Indirect Immunofluorescence Antibody Assay). This test shows whether or not the virus has reached the bone marrow or other tissues. The ELISA test may be performed at your veterinarian's office, while the IFA needs to be sent out to a testing laboratory.

In most cases, the ELISA test should be used as a screening test, and the IFA as the confirmatory test. In some cases, the results are not the same, and the cat must be re-tested at 4-6 week intervals for 90 days.

WHAT TO DO IN MULTIPLE CAT HOMES

All cats in a household must be tested. In cases where no cats have FeLV, make sure the disease does not enter your household by doing the following:

- Make sure cats stay indoors, away from potentially infected cats
- Always provide supervision and an outside enclosure if you allow cats outdoors
- Only adopt cats who do not have FeLV
- If cats go to shows, are boarded, or may otherwise be exposed to other cats, vaccinate them against FeLV

IN CASES WHERE YOU DO HAVE A FELV-POSITIVE CAT

- Keep the infected cat away from the other cats and do not allow sharing of food/water bowls or litter boxes. In addition, disinfect all dishes and litter boxes used by the infected cat
- Test all cats in the household every 90 days until the uninfected cats have two consecutive negative results
- Vaccinate all uninfected cats
- Make sure FeLV-positive cats receive proper nutrition, proper vaccination from other diseases, parasite control and a low

HOW FELV SPREADS

FeLV is excreted in saliva, tears, urine, and feces. It is most commonly transmitted via nose-to-nose contact, mutual grooming, and shared food and water bowls. Prolonged exposure to the virus is usually necessary for transmission in adult cats. Therefore, it is important to keep your cat's environment, including food dishes and litter boxes, clean. It is also important to ensure each cat has his/her own set of dishes and litter box.

stress environment. Additionally, regularly monitor the health of your FeLV-positive cat

Remember that a cat infected with FeLV may not show symptoms. If you have a household with a FeLV-positive cat, it is best not to get any more cats.