Spotlight on Feline Herpesvirus

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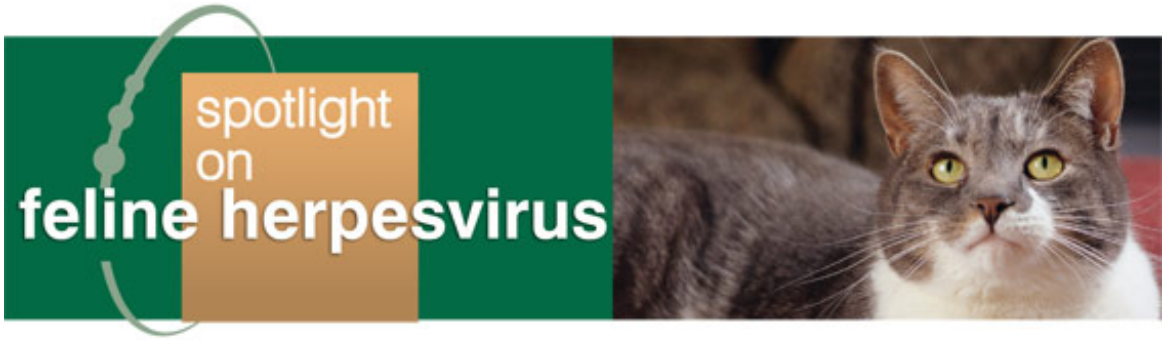

WHAT IS FELINE HERPESVIRUS?

Feline herpesvirus (FHV-1 or rhinotracheitis virus) is a primary cause of feline upper respiratory disease in both household and wild cats. The virus is also a common cause of conjunctivitis, keratitis (corneal inflammation), and corneal ulcers. FHV-1 has been known to infect both kittens and adult cats, although the condition is more prevalent in younger cats. Most infected cats will become carriers. The virus can remain dormant in carriers for years and reappear during times of high stress or when the feline is dealing with other health problems such as FeLV (feline leukemia) or FIV (feline immunodeficiency virus).

SYMPTOMS AND TREATMENT

Indicators that your cat may be suffering from feline herpesvirus include clear or cloudy discharge from the eyes, sneezing, nasal discharge, drooling, fever, severe depression, and rarely, oral ulcers. Cats affected by feline herpes may not eat due to a reduced sense of smell and taste. If your cat is experiencing similar symptoms, visit your veterinarian. Your veterinarian will examine the cat and may perform some lab tests on her affected eye and nasal secretions.

Cats diagnosed with feline herpesvirus are given antibiotics to prevent any secondary bacterial infections. Those with corneal ulcers also receive an antiviral medication, to prevent permanent damage to the eyes. The antiviral medication is often paired with an oral form of the amino acid L-lysine, to manage chronic herpesvirus infections. Pain relievers are sometimes necessary to ease the pain from the corneal ulcers.

PREVENT THE SPREAD

Feline herpesvirus is a virulent condition that can be spread through contact with the discharge from the eyes and nose of an infected cat. Contaminated items such as food and water bowls, hands, and bedding can harbor the virus and may be responsible for transferring it from one cat to another. To help avoid carrier cats from developing active infections, protect them from stress, and talk to your veterinarian about the use of L-lysine.

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Precautions such as regular vaccinations, proper sanitation, and limited contact with sick, strange or wild cats should limit the chances of your cat becoming infected with feline herpes.

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