



Maidstone Veterinary Clinic

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FIV - FELINE AIDS

What is Feline AIDS?

Feline AIDS is caused by infection with feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV). FIV causes a potentially fatal viral disease that interferes with the immune system of a cat. . Even though the feline virus is related to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), no human has ever been reported to be infected with FIV.

How is it transmitted (And is my cat at risk)?

- FIV virus lives in the blood of the infected cat and is carried in its system throughout its life.
- Infected cats expose healthy cats they come into contact, primarily by biting & fight wounds.
- Outside cats and those that fight a great deal are most at risk.
- It is an extremely fragile virus that doesn't survive outside of the cats' body so it is highly unlikely to be spread through casual contact and communal water bowls or grooming.
- It is possible for a mother cat to pass it on to her kittens, however this is rare.

What are the Symptoms?

Cats infected with FIV may remain healthy for up to 10 years. While some infected cats show no sign of disease, others may display the following symptoms:

Initial Symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Loss of Appetite
- Diarrhoea
- Lethargy
- Swollen Lymph Nodes

Later Symptoms can include:

- Weight loss
- Sores in and around the mouth
- Eye lesions
- Poor coat
- Chronic infections

Eventually the immune system becomes too weak to fight off other infections or disease. As a result, the cat will die from one of these subsequent infections.

How common is feline AIDS in the New Zealand cat population?

The prevalence of the FIV virus in the New Zealand cat population ranges from 7% (in healthy cats) up to 27.3% (in sick older cats). A recent study off 334 feral cats tested, showed 21.5% were FIV positive and hence infected with Feline AIDS. More than two thirds of the FIV-infected feral cats were male. Interestingly Australia and New Zealand have the highest rates of FIV infection in the world.

How is FIV Diagnosed?

- A blood test can be carried out to test for antibodies to the virus.
- These antibodies don't always appear until 60 days after infection so repeat testing is sometimes advised.

How is FIV Treated?

- There is no specific treatment for FIV.
- Symptomatic treatment is best course of action.
- Prevention is better than cure.

How can I prevent my cat from contracting FIV?

- Keep indoor cats separated from outdoor cats.
- Test all new cats to a household.
- Try to prevent roaming. Eg neutering, keeping cat inside at night.
- Isolate aggressive cats.
- Vaccinate!

Prevention through vaccination is now readily available

Feline AIDS prevention and the FIV Vaccine.

Vaccination is the best way to prevent Feline AIDS in all cats and especially kittens with outdoor access. There is no treatment or cure for an FIV infected cat. The Fel-O-Vax[®] FIV vaccine requires three doses at 2-4 week intervals to build strong immunity, then annual boosters are required. Kittens are particularly good candidates for the vaccine course since they are already undergoing vaccination for the flu and enteritis diseases and are unlikely to have contracted the virus through fighting.

Adult cats also require three injections to start the FIV course, followed by annual boosters. Because an adult cat may have contracted the Feline AIDS virus earlier in its life; it is advisable to perform an in-house FIV blood test just prior to the first vaccination.

Summary

Feline AIDS is a serious life-threatening disease affecting a reasonable proportion of the New Zealand cat population. There is no treatment or cure for Feline AIDS only prevention through vaccination. Talk with your veterinarian about the best vaccination program for your cat.

How much will it cost me? (Ask staff for current prices)

- Blood test: advised in cats over 5 months of age!
- Micro-chipping and Life Registration: Because FIV vaccinated cats will give a positive result for the standard antibody test, we strongly recommend that your cat is micro-chipped/ This way, if (s)he becomes lost or stray, your beloved cat will be returned to you and not be mistaken for an FIV infected cat. (these can be tested with a PCR test that looks for viral DNA in the blood)
- Initial course of three vaccinations :
- Yearly booster vaccination:

If you would like further information or would like to book your cat in for this vaccination please contact our reception staff.