



Connecticut Humane Society  
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## Feline Immunodeficiency Virus

### *What is it?*

FIV is a virus that infects only cats, causing reduced function of the immune (disease-fighting) system. It can also cause a syndrome similar to AIDS in people but the feline virus does NOT infect humans or other species.

### *What are the signs?*

Cats infected with FIV have an early phase of illness that lasts 4-6 weeks. They may develop fever, depression, and enlarged lymph nodes (lymph glands) which can last weeks to months. Illness may be mild and not noticeable. After the early phase of illness, cats can appear completely normal for years but, despite the lack of signs, the virus is destroying the cat's ability to fight infection. FIV+ cats may get recurrent eye, mouth, respiratory, ear, skin, and GI infections and/or repeated abscesses. Some cats develop anemia, personality changes, cancer, or kidney failure.

### *How is it spread?*

FIV is most often spread through cat bites sustained while they are fighting. It is occasionally transmitted to kittens by their mothers.

### *How is it diagnosed?*

A quick and simple blood test is available to test for the presence of FIV, although cats in early stages of infection may not test positive. A cat that has had a vaccination against FIV will always test POSITIVE on future blood tests, therefore infection cannot be confirmed in these cats. It's also important to note that young kittens may test positive from maternal antibodies if their mother was FIV+. Kittens which test positive should be retested 4 – 6 weeks from the original test to and again at 6 months of age to either confirm or rule out infection. If the blood tests remain positive, true infection is likely.

### *What is the treatment?*

There are no good antiviral drugs available for cats, so unfortunately there is no treatment for FIV. Once infected, the cat remains infected for life, but most of these cats can live for years without any major health concerns. Positive cats can be treated with antibiotics for any secondary bacterial infections that arise.

### *What should I do at home?*

FIV+ cats should be kept indoors for the safety of other cats and to limit their exposure to other diseases. Feed a high-quality diet and provide fresh, clean water at all times. Limit stress to keep their immune function as strong as possible.

### *What should I expect in the future?*

Any signs of infection should be brought to the attention of your regular veterinarian promptly, since the FIV-infected cat will have limited ability to fight disease.