



Adopting an FIV+ Cat

Among the thousands of cats that come through KC Pet Projects' doors every year, a handful end up testing positive for FIV, or Feline Immunodeficiency Virus. FIV is often mistakenly called "Feline AIDS," or "Cat HIV," resulting in panic in some adopters. Many questions and myths exist about FIV, commonly resulting in FIV+ cats waiting twice as long to find an adopter as our regular residents. FIV+ Cats can (and often do) live long, healthy lives, just like other non-infected cats, with just a few changes made to their routine and care.

What to Expect Owning an FIV+ Cat

Cats with FIV have a compromised immune system virus, so it is strongly recommended that FIV+ Cats remain as indoor cats. This helps to prevent their exposure to other viruses carried by wild cats, and reduces the chance that they may get into an accident that they will have a hard time recovering from. They should have clean, regulated environments much the same as any other cat.

While most cats go to the vet once-a-year, it is usually a good idea to make more frequent visits to your vet when owning an FIV+ cat. The American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) recommends checkups at least twice-a-year. If you notice your FIV cat is acting under the weather, do not hesitate to take them for a checkup. Cats do not pass away from FIV, but if there is an underlying viral or bacterial infection, their body has a difficult time mounting a defense. Lots of FIV+ cats do not begin to show symptoms of a weakened immune system until late in life, when many cats' immune systems naturally begin to slow down.

In the early 90s, much less was known about FIV, and as a result some vets today that aren't up-to-date on the latest information about the condition still prefer to euthanize all FIV+ cats based on outdated information. It was incorrectly thought for some time that there was a correlation between FIV and the deadly Feline Leukemia virus. We now know considerably more about FIV than those days, and the AAFP does not suggest euthanasia for FIV+ cats. As an owner of an FIV+ cat, you may have to find the veterinarian that has some experience with FIV and keeps up on recent research and best practices.

Living with Other Animals

FIV+ Cats are able to live freely with other non-Feline animals (dogs, ferrets, etc.) without the fear of transmission. Again, FIV is a Feline *specific* virus. If other cats are present in the home, several options exist for the patient adopter. FIV is only spread through mating or deep bite wounds – something uncommon in spayed/neutered animals that are kept indoors. Through properly and patiently introducing the cats, and monitoring their interactions between each other, FIV+ cats can safely live alongside other healthy cats. There is also a vaccine available for FIV+ but it is still controversial and should be discussed with a vet before receiving.

Commonly Asked Questions about FIV

What is FIV? – FIV is the acronym for Feline Immunodeficiency Virus, a cat specific lentivirus that targets the white blood cells of a cat.

How is FIV spread? – FIV is spread only through deep bite wounds from an infected cat, mating, or passed on genetically from mother to kittens. It is most often seen in unaltered, roaming male cats that enter into territory conflict with other males.

Can it infect me or my other pets? – FIV is specific to felines, and cannot affect other species of animals. It can be spread, however, to other cats through mating or bite wounds (uncommon even with disgruntled cohabitants). It is not passed casually, as with Feline Leukemia. Transmission is uncommon in altered, inside felines.

How long do FIV+ cats typically live? – FIV has not been proven to cause a direct drop in life expectancy, and often live in the standard lifespan for cats kept indoors, 15-18 years of age. With regular vet visits, it is not uncommon to have such cats live longer!

What are the symptoms of FIV? – When the cat is first infected, it may run a fever or have swollen lymph nodes. Following that, cats may not show any symptoms of suppressed immune system for weeks, months, or years. In its most advanced stage, cats become more susceptible to outside forms of infection and disease. That is why it is important to have your cat seen by the vet if he or she is showing early signs of illness.

What are common health concerns for FIV+ Cats? – As well as their increased risk fighting off viral infections, FIV+ cats are prone to common infections in the skin (often in patches of itchy missing hair), periodontal disease or gum inflammation, diarrhea, and urinary tract infections. These areas should receive attention on your regular veterinary checkups, and be counteracted with good diet.

Is there a vaccine? – There is currently an FIV vaccine in use in the US. There is often controversy surrounding it, so always consult a veterinarian before deciding to vaccinate any household cats.

Why should I adopt an FIV+ Cat? – Adopting an FIV+ Cat can be a wonderful opportunity to give an otherwise down-and-out cat a chance at living in a loving home. FIV+ Cats need their owners' love and attentiveness to ensure they live a long and healthy life. In some cases, FIV+ cats *outlive* regular cats, due to their regular trips to the vet, usually identifying issues long before they become a problem!

Resources

Best Friends - FAQs About Feline Immunodeficiency Virus FIV

<http://bestfriends.org/resources/faqs-about-feline-immunodeficiency-virus-fiv>

Cornell University Feline Health Center - Feline Immunodeficiency Virus

http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/health_information/brochure_fiv.cfm

Maddie's Fund – FeLV & FIV

<http://www.maddiesfund.org/felv-and-fiv.htm>

“FIV Friendly” Veterinarians

Below are few KC Metro veterinarians that are very knowledgeable about care for FIV cats. Call KC Pet Project at 816-683-1383 for additional referrals.

Dr. Bradley
Blue Springs Animal Hospital
1201 US-40, Blue Springs, MO 64015
(816) 229-1544

Mariposa Veterinary Wellness Center
13900 Santa Fe Trail Dr, Lenexa, KS 66215
(913) 825-3330

KC Cat Clinic
7107 Main St, Kansas City, MO 64113
(816) 361-4888

Platte Woods Animal Hospital
5901 NW 72nd St, Kansas City, MO 64151
(816) 741-8600

Dr Risen
Fairway Animal Hospital
6000 Mission Rd, Fairway, KS 66205
(913) 432-7611

Dr. Webster
Northland Animal Hospital
8351 NW Barrybrooke Dr
Kansas City, MO 64151
816-746-1333