

FELINE FATAL DISEASES

In the past, feline distemper, the major respiratory infections, and rabies killed millions of cats every year. Fortunately, the vaccinations that have been developed and available for many years have now controlled these diseases. They are, however, still common in outdoor and unvaccinated cats.

New diseases are now killing millions of cats each year. It is estimated that at least 10% of all cats in this country are infected with one or more of these viruses. Once your cat becomes infected with one of these diseases, your cat will die. There are no effective treatments or cures. Laboratory tests are also available to diagnose cats that are infected with these deadly viruses. Vaccinations are now available for at least some of them. Therefore our major strategy for maintaining a healthy pet is by preventing the spread of these infections through blood testing and vaccination.

These viral infections include:

FELINE LEUKEMIA, FELINE AIDS VIRUS, & FIP (Feline Infectious Peritonitis). All three of these infections can be carried and spread for long periods of time by cats who are harboring the viruses but show no obvious signs of disease. Cats who appear healthy can be infected yet not come down with the illness for months or years. During these months or years, however, they are contagious and can infect other cats.

FELINE LEUKEMIA (FeLV):

Feline infections are the number one killer today. Feline leukemia destroys the cat's immune system causing anemia, cancer, and a lowered resistance to fight off other diseases that a healthy cat would not get. A blood test is available to help diagnose the disease. It is recommended that all new cats brought into a household be tested before being exposed to other cats in the house. Effective vaccines have been available for more than 10 years and are recommended. Proper vaccination includes an initial series of 2 injections followed by annual boosters. To ensure immunity, testing the cat before vaccination is recommended to ensure the cat is not already infected even though no clinical signs are evident.

FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS (FIV) - also known as "FELINE AIDS VIRUS":

It is a relative to the HIV virus that causes AIDS in people. This virus does its damage by depressing the cat's own immune system, making it much more susceptible to other common cat infectious diseases. As of yet, there is **NO** vaccine available for this disease. However we do have an accurate blood test that will tell whether or not the cat is a carrier of the disease. For maximum accuracy, the cat should be 6 months of age before being tested. This particular test detects blood "antibodies" to the disease. It takes time for these antibodies to develop in the blood yielding the positive test. Therefore, a recent exposure of 30-90 days or less may not have provided sufficient time for antibodies to develop that would be detected by the test.

FELINE INFECTIOUS PERITONITIS (FIP):

This virus can survive in damp areas such as dirt in your garden or sandbox for several months. You can bring it into your house on your shoes, hands, or clothes to infect even the cat that never goes outside. Laboratory testing for this disease is not as accurate as for the other diseases, and requires testing twice at a 30-day interval.



RULES TO HELP PREVENT THE SPREAD OF THESE FATAL DISEASES:

- **Keep your cat indoors** all the time to minimize exposure.
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- Always test and vaccinate any new cats **BEFORE** bringing into the household.
- Wash your hands after handling or petting any unfamiliar cats outside your home.

REMEMBER: There are no cures for these fatal diseases. Vaccination is your best line of defense.

