



# Feline Leukemia Virus

Feline leukemia virus (FeLV) is an enveloped RNA retrovirus. This virus is contagious among cats. Adult, healthy cats are relatively resistant to the infection and most exposed cats will clear the virus. However, once a persistent infection is established, it is incurable.

FeLV can lead to several types of cancer, including leukemia and lymphoma. The virus can also cause other disease processes such as anemia, bleeding disorders, neurologic disease, and immunosuppression. The exact progression of disease and survival time cannot be known for an individual cat; however, it is believed that approximately 80% of infected cats die within three years of becoming infected. It is possible (and common!) for a cat to have an excellent quality of life prior to developing FeLV related diseases.

Treatment of infected cats is centered on decreasing stress, proper nutrition, regular preventative veterinary care, and treating any secondary conditions. FeLV positive cats must be housed indoors, and must visit a veterinarian (at least) twice yearly for a physical exam.

FeLV is shed in saliva of infected cats and can be transmitted via direct contact (grooming) or through contaminated objects (fomites). Spread of the virus via sneezing (airborne transmission) is not a concern, as the virus is not present in high enough concentrations and cats do not sneeze with enough force to realistically spread FeLV in this manner. In addition to saliva, low levels of the virus can also be present in urine, feces, and blood of infected cats. A queen can transmit the virus to her offspring through the placenta.

The virus is not stable in the environment and is inactivated by most disinfectants. Cages should be spot cleaned daily unless heavily soiled. Avoid changing food and water bowls frequently, allow the cat to keep the same bowls for an extended period of time, cleaning them as necessary. FeLV positive cats should be cleaned last, as this decreases the chances of spread to other cats. Wear gloves while cleaning and interacting with positive cats, and wash your hands afterwards. FeLV cats should never be in group housing or housed with FeLV negative cats.