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## **FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS (FIV)**

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) is a virus that is spread through the saliva and blood of cats. It is in the same subfamily as the human AIDS virus, however, cats are the only species that are affected by FIV- there is no risk to people or dogs. Any cat that spends time outdoors, escapes, is a stray, or fights with other cats is at risk for acquiring FIV. Interestingly, the prevalence of FIV infection increases with age.

Once infected, a cat can show a variety of signs depending on the stage of the disease and the cat's response to the virus. FIV disables your cat's immune system, resulting in an acute transient stage of illness that occurs several weeks after exposure followed by a chronic secondary stage that may occur months to years later. Many cats may remain clinically normal for a prolonged period of time before entering the chronic secondary phase. The most common diseases seen with FIV include chronic respiratory infections, skin infections, mouth infections (stomatitis), chronic abscesses, and chronic enteritis. The infected cat may also present with nonspecific signs such as weight loss, fever of unknown origin, anorexia, lymphadenopathy (abnormal enlargement of the lymph nodes), anemia, leukopenia (low white blood cell count), and behavioral changes. FIV positive cats have higher incidence of certain types of cancer.

**FIV is diagnosed through a blood test** which detects antibodies to the virus. There is no specific treatment for the virus. The treatment of cats with FIV currently is limited to supportive care and treatment of opportunistic infections. Symptomatic treatment with antibiotics, fluids, and nutritional support is effective in early stages, but is less effective as the disease progresses. There are some antiviral drugs which may prove to be of benefit, and research is continuing in that area.

Recently a vaccine has been approved for use in cats to aid in the prevention of FIV infection. As with all vaccines, it is not 100% effective, but significantly aids in keeping those cats at risk protected. Unfortunately, a cat who is vaccinated will test positive on the antibody blood test (as it builds up antibodies to prevent infection from the real virus). Therefore, cats who are receiving the FIV vaccine should be permanently identified via a microchip to prevent misinterpretation of a positive test. In addition, only those cats that test negative for FIV should be vaccinated and labeled a "true" negative.

The FIV vaccine is recommended for FIV negative, at-risk cats only, and as always, **a FIV positive cat should not be allowed outdoors to prevent the spread of this disease.**

**The Veterinarian or Veterinary Technicians can answer your questions, and help you make decisions based on your individual animal and household situation.**