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FELINE LEUKEMIA

The Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) is a virus that is transmitted from cat to cat by direct contact through blood, urine, or saliva. Multiple cat households and cats that roam have an increased likelihood of contracting the disease. FeLV can also be transmitted from the mother (queen) to her kittens. **Feline Leukemia is not contagious to humans or other pets (other than cats).**

PATHOGENESIS:

Once exposed to the FeLV virus, one of three outcomes is possible:

- 1) 24-40% of exposed cats will have an appropriate immune response and **recover**.
- 2) 30-40% of exposed cats will become **persistently infected**. These cats may or may not show signs of disease but will actively shed the virus, and will test positive.
- 3) 10-30% of exposed cats will develop a state of latency (infected but not shedding virus). **Latent infections** may be reactivated.

It is impossible to predict the outcome or determine which cats will show signs of disease once they test positive. **However, it is known that the majority of the persistently infected cats will die within 3 years.**

CLINICAL SIGNS:

Feline Leukemia can have a wide variety of clinical signs, but the most common are immunosuppression, anemia, and cancers of the bone marrow and lymph system.

TESTING:

A test is available that tests for viral particles in the blood. A test can be done with a drawn blood sample in 15-20 minutes at our clinic. All cats and kittens should be tested, especially before adding a new cat to the household, and before vaccinating. A **positive test** indicates the cat has been exposed to the FeLV virus. It is recommended that a positive cat be **retested** in 3-6 weeks to see if it may clear or reject the virus. A **negative** test indicates that no viral particles are present in the blood. It is possible for a cat to test negative but have an early infection or latent infection. If the cat has possibly had recent exposure to a FeLV positive cat, it should be re-tested in 3-6 weeks to assure that it remains negative.

THERAPY:

There currently are no effective treatments that will cure Feline Leukemia. Symptomatic therapy and supportive care may help prolong the life of a cat with Feline Leukemia, but we have no cure.

PREVENTION:

- 1) The best prevention is to prevent exposure to Feline Leukemia positive cats.
- 2) A safe, effective vaccine has recently been developed which helps protect your cat from Feline Leukemia. We recommend this vaccine for all cats who have tested negative and who come in contact with other cats. This includes indoor/outdoor cats, show cats and cats that will be boarded or groomed.

The vaccination schedule consists of two vaccinations for cats older than nine weeks of age, 3-4 weeks apart. Yearly boosters are needed to keep your cat protected.