

## FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS “CAT AIDS”

### What is it?

- An immunosuppressive viral disease specific to cats – other species, including humans, are NOT at risk.
- It is primarily spread through saliva entering through bite wounds. It may also be spread from an infected mother cat to her young (in-utero or through her milk). It rarely may be spread within multiple cat households via saliva on food bowls and mutual grooming. It is not sexually transmitted.

### Which cats are at risk?

- Cats with outdoor access and contact with other cats are at the greatest risk.
- Entire tomcats (entire = not desexed) are 3 times more likely to be infected.
- Cats that are prone to fighting are at a higher risk of becoming infected.
- Kittens born to a mother infected with FIV are at risk but will not always become infected.
- Cats that live in an area that have higher levels of FIV in the cat population are at a greater risk of becoming infected.

### What signs will you see?

- Initially nothing, although you may have noticed that the cat has been in a fight. Sometimes nothing will be noticed for months or years. These cats are still contagious.
- Clinical signs can vary widely from cat to cat. They can be related to the direct impact of the virus or secondary to the immunosuppression it causes.
- Acute infections (from 4 weeks to 4 months following infection) – you may see – fever, malaise, diarrhoea. This phase may go unnoticed.
- Chronic infections (long term, final stage, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome AIDS) – weight loss, opportunistic infections that are difficult to treat (eg. Cat flu, abscesses), oral/dental disease, neurological, respiratory, gastroenterological, and ocular diseases may sometimes be seen, cancers may be more likely to develop. Signs may wax and wane.
- Abortions and stillbirths can also occur in pregnant cats.

### **How do you diagnose FIV infection?**

- A blood test is available to identify FIV infection. Testing is recommended if there has been a suspected exposure (for example, a cat bite wound in an unvaccinated cat) or if any of the above clinical signs are apparent.
- FIV testing should be performed at least 60 days following suspected exposure. The test may be negative prior to this as it can take 60 days for the immune system to produce detectable antibodies against the virus.
- Differential diagnoses are: Feline Leukaemia virus (FeLV), feline infectious peritonitis (FIP), toxoplasmosis, other immunosuppressive conditions such as cancer, other severe chronic diseases such as kidney disease.

### **What treatment is available?**

- There is no specific treatment or cure. FIV can only be managed. Anti-viral and supportive medications can be trialed, and treatment of opportunistic infections is essential. Regular veterinary assessment is recommended (at least every 6 months).
- Ensure worming and flea treatment is up to date and feed a high-quality diet. Ensure vaccinations are up to date (killed vaccinations are required).
- Patients will require euthanasia when debilitation is affecting quality of life.

### **What steps can you undertake to minimise the chances of infection?**

- Vaccinate cats against FIV after testing as appropriate. Ensure new additions to a multi-cat household are tested for FIV and vaccinated against it before contact with other cats.
- Desex all cats.
- Keep cats indoors, particularly overnight (this is when most fights occur).
- Keep FIV infected cats indoors only.