

FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS “CAT AIDS”

What is it?

- A viral disease, specific to cats – other species, including man, are NOT at risk.
- Immune depressant – infection leads to a suppression of the natural immune system, meaning the cat cannot fight infection, or heat properly.
- Spread by bites, in saliva. ie while fighting. It is not therefore a sexually transmitted disease, although fighting and biting is part and parcel of feline sexual activity!

Which cats are at risk?

Any cat with access to other cats, but predominantly, and in order of likelihood

- entire tomcats (entire = not desexed).
- cats exposed to entire tomcats, especially if they themselves are entire (get rid of stray toms!).
- habitual fighters.

What signs will you see?

- Initially nothing, although you may have noticed that the cat has been in a fight.
- Sometimes nothing for months – but the cat will be infectious to others.
- Chronic (meaning long term) infections – most commonly either “cat flu” that will not clear up, or an abscess that refuses to go away even after antibiotics.
- Immune depression is not constant – infections may wax and wane.
- Eventual debilitation, as the chronic infections run the body right down.

How do you diagnose FIV infection?

- By a blood test performed in clinic. The test is recommended in the face of the above symptoms. Results are available immediately.
- Differential diagnoses are: Feline leukaemia virus (not seen here yet), debilitation due to kidney failure or cancer.

What treatment is available?

- Nothing specific.
- Attempt to treat the concurrent infections, and support to alleviate the debilitation.
- Considerate owners should endeavour to limit the spread of the disease by locking the cat up at night.
- Patients will require euthanasia when debilitation is extreme.

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

- Desex all cats.
- Eradicate strays, especially toms.

Lock cats up at night, the worst time for fighting.