



FIV in Cats, by Dr. Theresa Gregory

FIV stands for Feline Immunodeficiency Virus. FIV is a lentivirus, in the same family as human HIV. While this may sound scary, most cats that are infected with FIV lead healthy lives for years before they ever show signs of infection. FIV is not contagious to people or any animals other than cats.

FIV is found in about 1.5-3% of the general population. The virus is actually fairly difficult to spread. The main route of infection is through deep bite wounds or rarely from the mother cat to her kittens at the time of birth or through nursing. It cannot be spread through casual contact such as grooming or sharing food bowls and litter boxes.

If you have a cat that is diagnosed with FIV, there are a few things you should know about caring for him. The most important is to keep your cat indoors. Going outside increases the risk of exposure to infections and of fighting with resulting abscesses. Infections can speed up the progress of FIV infection because every time the immune system is stimulated, the amount of virus in the cat's white blood cells increases. If infections do occur they should be treated promptly. It is recommended that FIV positive cats receive veterinary health checks twice yearly to catch any problems before they become serious. Other recommendations include those that are made for all cats – keep him current on vaccinations, provide adequate flea and internal parasite control to avoid more stress on his immune system, and provide a high quality diet to support healthy immune function. Avoid feeding raw diets or foods, there is too much risk of bacterial contamination and subsequent infection.

The average lifespan of a cat with FIV is reported to be about 5 years, but with proper care and an indoor environment many infected cats can live to their normal life expectancy of 12 years or more.