

## Facts about FIV

- FIV is a highly species-specific virus.
- Humans cannot be carriers for FIV.
- FIV cats can lead long, healthy lives with few or no symptoms.
- FIV isn't easily passed between cats though normal day-to-day activities.
- A spayed or neutered cat is extremely unlikely to spread the disease to other healthy cats if introduced properly.
- Aggressive, free-roaming male cats are more likely to become infected with FIV than any other type of domesticated cat.
- Male cats are two times more likely to be FIV-positive than female cats.
- The average age of FIV-infected cats is 3 to 5 years old.
- FIV-positive cats should be kept as healthy as you can possibly keep them.
- FIV-positive cats must remain indoors, free from stress, kept on a high-quality diet, and be treated by a vet as soon as any secondary infection occurs.

*This informational brochure has been provided by the Berkeley-East Bay Humane Society. For more information on FIV, contact your local veterinarian.*



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The Berkeley-East Bay Humane Society is a private nonprofit organization dedicated to placing homeless animals with committed caretakers; to developing healthy relationships between pets and people through education, training and counseling; and to promoting the humane treatment of all animals.

## Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)

## What You Need to Know



Photo by Roy Santos

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## Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)

**FIV was discovered during a California cat rescue in 1986. Some of the cats appeared to have an illness similar to AIDS. It is probably that those cats contracted FIV a number of years before showing any symptoms. Since 1986, FIV has been found in every country that does FIV testing.**

### How common is FIV?

The prevalence of FIV varies from 1% to 15% (with the American Association of Feline Practitioners suggesting that 1 in every 12 cats tested is FIV positive). In the U.S., approximately 1.5% to 3% of all healthy cats have been infected with FIV.

FIV is least common in rural areas where the cat population is low or in areas where most or all cats are kept indoors.

### How is FIV spread?

Although the virus is present in a cat's blood, saliva, and cerebrospinal fluid, it is extremely fragile. Therefore, FIV does not survive outside the infected cat's body for very long.

FIV is shed through a cat's saliva. The most common mode of transmission is through bite wounds that occur during catfights. FIV is rarely spread by casual day-to-day contact between cats in households with stable social structures.

FIV may also be transmitted from a mother cat to her kittens. This type of transmission usually occurs when the kitten passes through the birth canal or ingests infected milk. Sexual contact between cats is not a primary means of spreading FIV.

FIV-positive cats are able to share food bowls, litter boxes, and toys without transmitting the virus to other cats in the household. FIV-positive cats can even sleep and play with other cats in the household without infecting them.

### What does FIV do to a cat?

A cat may appear normal for years after initial FIV infection. However, within 4 to 6 weeks, white blood cell counts start to decline. Some cats may also have swollen lymph nodes, fever, diarrhea, and/or anemia. Over time, FIV hinders the cat's immune system, leading to chronic health problems and allowing opportunistic infections to run rampant through the cat's body. For instance, FIV-positive cats have chronic gum and mouth inflammation.

There are 3 stages of FIV disease. The first stage, or the acute stage, generally occurs 4 to 6 weeks after the initial infection. Some common symptoms of this stage are fever, swollen lymph nodes, and skin or intestinal infections.

The second stage, the latent or sub-clinical stage, can last for years. There may be no signs of FIV, although the immune system may be slowly destroyed during this time. During the third stage, the final or chronic stage, the cat's immune system isn't functioning correctly, which makes it nearly impossible for the cat to fight off infection. Infections during this stage are usually chronic and vary from upper respiratory infections, skin & ear diseases, chronic sinusitis, and intestinal infections. Rarely, an FIV-positive cat will develop a neurological dysfunction or tumors.



### How is FIV treated and managed?

It is most important that you inform your veterinarian that your cat is FIV-positive to ensure that your vet will treat your cat with the best of care, such as proper vaccinations and aggressive treatment when infections occur.

Try to keep your cat's stress level low. A common stressor for cats is any type of change, small or large. Try to keep as stable and unchanging an environment for your FIV-positive cat as possible. Also avoid allowing your FIV-positive cat to have contact with other ill animals.

FIV-positive cats should be indoor-only cats (no exceptions) to help prevent secondary infections and to help prevent the spread of FIV to other cats.

Feed your cat a nutritional diet, avoiding uncooked foods like raw meat, eggs and unpasteurized dairy products.

Visit the vet regularly—at least every six months. Your veterinarian should do a complete blood count, serum biochemical analysis, and a urine analysis annually.

**Don't forget to love and cherish your cat every day!**