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LIVING WITH A FeLV POSITIVE CAT

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What is FeLV?

Feline Leukemia Virus is a retrovirus that is one of the most common infectious diseases of cats. There is a higher risk factor for male gender, adulthood, and outdoor roaming cats. Cats that test positive may live for many years depending on what stage of the virus they have.

The Stages of FeLV

There are three stages: Abortive, Regressive, and Progressive.

The Abortive stage is when the cat clears the infection on its own. The Regressive stage is when the cat temporarily becomes viremic. The cat does not become ill from any of the FeLV associated diseases but will have a viral DNA integrated into its genome. The Progressive Stage is when the cats shed the virus through their saliva, nasal and ocular secretions, urine, feces, and milk. Cats in the progressive stage may have associated FeLV diseases such as lymphoma, leukemia, anemia, and infectious diseases. Cats that test positive should remain indoors and away from cats that were tested negative. If it is not possible to keep the cats separated then rehoming may be necessary.

When Should Cats Be Tested?

All new cats or kittens should be tested prior to being introduced to the household. A cat will test positive within 30 days of being exposed to the virus. Any cats that venture outside or live in a household with an infected cat should also be considered for testing. Cats that become clinically ill regardless of their age or previous test results should also be tested. The test detects the infection and not clinical disease so euthanasia should not be an automatic decision. While it can be a life threatening disease it can be properly managed with veterinary care.

What Cats Should Be Tested?

All kittens should be vaccinated because their lifestyles may change when they get older. Any cats that venture outdoors, live in a household with an infected cat, or are around cats of an unknown status should be vaccinated yearly. Cats should be viral tested before receiving the vaccine and viral tested yearly.

What Are the Signs of FeLV?

Owners should look out for these changes in their cat's behavior: Inappropriate urination, changes in social interaction, activity level, sleeping habits, food and water consumptions, vocalization, unexpected weight loss or gain, and signs of stress.

Having a cat that is FeLV positive is not a death sentence! Some cats may never show any signs that they are infected while others may show the symptoms of being positive. They should remain indoors and away from all other cats that are negative.

They should be fed a nutritional diet and visit their veterinarian 1-2 times a year for checkups. Cats with FeLV should seek veterinary care at the first sign of illness as they may need medical intervention earlier than cats without an immunosuppressive virus. 

