

Jefferson Animal Hospital
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Jefferson Animal Hospital
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Feline Leukemia

Q. What is Feline Leukemia?

A. Leukemia is a highly fatal blood cell cancer that is contagious between cats. It is a leading cause of cat deaths and, until now, there has been no prevention or cure. The name “Feline Leukemia Virus” (FeLV) gives merely a hint of just how much trouble this contagious virus can cause. Another cancer, lymphosarcoma, is actually a more common FeLV disease. Still more common are associated diseases such as Feline Infectious Peritonitis, Respiratory Disease and Fading Kitten Syndrome. Cats infected with FeLV have limited ability to resist other infections by even the most common bacteria, colds, stomach problems, skin and mouth sores and anemia.

Q. How can I prevent my cat from getting Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)?

A. The only way besides vaccination is to prevent your cat’s exposure to other cats. This is very impractical since many are outside cats, accompany their owners on trips, are boarded during vacations, or are taken to cat shows, etc. Vaccination is recommended as the best protective procedure.

Q. What signs would my cat show if he has Feline Leukemia Virus?

A. It’s impossible to precisely diagnose FeLV entirely from the observable signs in the early stages because FeLV is associated with so many different disorders. However, signs such as depression, fever, loss of appetite and swollen glands in the neck or abdomen suggest onset of FeLV related disease. There are a number of tests available to detect FeLV. No test is 100% accurate, but the reliability of these tests is considered quite good. Feline Leukemia Virus is today regarded as a leading cause of pet cat deaths. Cats infected with FeLV rarely live more than three years and most die of associated diseases before the cancer develops.

Q. What if my cat already has Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)?

A. The vaccine has no effect on a cat already infected with the virus. It doesn't make it better or worse. The vaccine is not a treatment or a cure and we do not recommend the vaccine for cats already infected with FeLV. We do recommend that all cats be TESTED before receiving the vaccine. This test can be done by obtaining a small sample of blood and performing this simple test at Jefferson Animal Hospital’s lab facilities.

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Q. Can my kitten be vaccinated?

A. The earliest recommended age for vaccination is 9 weeks old. We do recommend testing on all kittens 6 weeks of age and older because it is possible for kittens to be exposed to the virus in the mother’s womb.

Please call us if you have any questions!