

# FELINE IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS

## FIV

Usdan Institute  
for Animal  
Health Education

**AMC**  
SINCE 1910  
ANIMAL MEDICAL CENTER

### What is it?

- A common infectious disease in cats.
- Affects 1.5-3% of all cats in the U.S.
- Can be spread from cat-to-cat through deep bite wounds, usually during fights.
- Male cats are more likely to get the virus than female cats.
- Outdoor cats are more likely to get the virus than indoor cats.
- Some kittens may be FIV+ positive from their infected mothers.
- Transmission in stable households is rare.

### What are the signs?

- Fever
- Enlarged lymph nodes (lumps near neck)
- Frequent bacterial infections, especially in eyes, mouth, and urinary tract
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Skin infections
- Neurological disease

### How is it diagnosed?

- A simple blood test looks for antibodies to the virus.
- An initial positive test should be confirmed with a second test.
- Testing should be done 12 weeks after possible exposure. The test is unlikely to detect the virus antibodies before 12 weeks.
- Cats who have been vaccinated against FIV will test positive for FIV. It's important to let your vet know if your cat has been vaccinated for FIV.

### Can it be treated?

- There is no cure for FIV.
- FIV is a lifelong disease, but it is rarely fatal and often easy to manage.
- Cats can live good, long lives after diagnosis.
- Treatment depends on the cat's signs and may include treating nausea, stimulating appetite, and managing pain.

### Can it be prevented?

- Spaying and neutering cats helps reduce aggression and the need to roam.
- FIV+ cats should be kept indoors to prevent spread to other cats.
- FIV+ cats are unlikely to transmit the virus to healthy cats, but it is possible.
- A vaccine exists, but it is not usually recommended. Talk to your vet to see if it is right for your cat.

### What should I do if my cat is FIV+?

- See a veterinarian every 6 months and make sure he/she knows your cat is FIV+.
- Feed a wholesome, nutritious, balanced diet.
- Provide all core vaccinations.
- Keep indoors or with access to an enclosed outdoor space.
- Reduce or prevent exposure to cats with unknown health or vaccine status.
- Monitor closely for signs of illness.