

# Feline Stomatitis

- Feline stomatitis is a severe, painful inflammation of a cat's mouth and gums.
- Dental disease, certain viruses, and some other inflammatory conditions can cause feline stomatitis.
- The long-term outcome can vary. Many cats require long-term treatment to control the condition.

### What Is Feline Stomatitis?

Feline stomatitis is a severe, painful inflammation of a cat's mouth and gums. In most cases, the condition causes ulcers to form in the mouth; these ulcers can involve the lips, tongue, gums, and back of the throat. Cats of any age or breed can be affected.

There is no single cause of feline stomatitis. Dental disease (particularly periodontal disease) is commonly implicated as a cause of stomatitis in cats. Periodontal disease results from the accumulation of plaque (bacteria) on and around the teeth, which causes inflammation involving the gums and tooth support structures.

In many cases, the cause is assumed to be immune-mediated, meaning that the cat's immune system attacks its own oral tissues as an abnormal response to bacteria in the mouth. Other medical conditions that can be associated with stomatitis include infection with viruses (such as feline leukemia virus [FeLV], feline immunodeficiency virus [FIV], and calicivirus) and bartonellosis.

### What Are the Clinical Signs of Feline Stomatitis?

Feline stomatitis is extremely painful. In some cases, a cat suffering with this condition may be in too much pain to open his or her mouth to eat. In other cases, the cat may try to eat, but scream and drop the food as soon as it touches the mouth. Other clinical signs may include the following:

- Drooling (sometimes with blood)
- unkempt hair coat (because grooming is painful)
- Refusal to eat

- Bad breath
- Weight loss
- Pawing at the face or mouth

### How Is Feline Stomatitis Diagnosed?

Examining the mouth of a cat with stomatitis can be difficult because the cat is reluctant to open his or her mouth. Your veterinarian may recommend sedation to facilitate a more complete examination.

Results of basic blood tests, such as a chemistry panel and complete blood cell count (CBC), tend to be unremarkable in cats with stomatitis. However, your veterinarian may recommend specific testing for underlying diseases such as FeLV, FIV, and bartonellosis.

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Sometimes, a small sample of tissue from the mouth is submitted to a laboratory for biopsy. However, the diagnosis is commonly based on clinical signs and physical examination findings. A dental examination and dental x-rays can help your veterinarian determine the extent of periodontal disease.

### What Are the Treatment and Outcome for Feline Stomatitis?

Because the condition is very painful, initial treatment generally includes giving medication to control pain and inflammation. Antibiotics are also commonly administered. Some cats may be willing to eat soft food, so owners may be advised to puree canned food until the cat's mouth heals.

Severe periodontal disease has been implicated as a cause of feline stomatitis. Although stomatitis is difficult to completely cure and treatment tends to be long term, your veterinarian will likely recommend managing dental disease as part of the overall

## Common Conditions

treatment plan. A thorough dental cleaning may be recommended, and many cats do well if the molar and premolar teeth are removed. Because tooth surfaces provide areas for bacteria to attach, removing the teeth can help control periodontal disease and minimize the bacteria that provoke the immune system in cats with stomatitis. Cats tend to do very well without their teeth.

If the cat has an underlying illness that can be treated, such as bartonellosis, treatment should be pursued.

Long-term outcome can vary. Many cats with stomatitis require long-term treatment with anti-inflammatory medications (and antibiotics intermittently) to control the condition. At-home tooth brushing and other dental care are recommended to reduce the accumulation of plaque and associated inflammation in the mouth.