

CELIA HAMMOND ANIMAL TRUST

FIV

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus

Which of these beautiful cats has been carrying the FIV virus for the last nine years?



Advice on the management of FIV positive cats.

What is FIV?

Although most people have heard of FIV, a virus that can progressively weaken a cat's immune system, there are many misconceptions about it. This has regrettably led to mass euthanasia of healthy FIV positive cats, or a miserable quality of life due to advice being given to keep cats isolated in virtual quarantine conditions. At C.H.A.T, we are regularly approached for advice from people all over the country who have discovered that their pets or strays they feed are, although healthy, FIV positive and find themselves under considerable pressure to euthanase the cats.

CHAT's policy on FIV is that routine euthanasia of healthy FIV positive cats is wrong and unnecessary.

This leaflet is written in direct response to numerous enquiries from our supporters and members of the public.

Dogs, humans and other animals CANNOT catch FIV.

FIV can only be transmitted between members of the cat family and is spread mostly via deep, penetrating bites. FIV positive cats may be healthy for many years before developing symptoms of full-blown FIV. Cats that have developed full-blown FIV rather than simply carrying the virus, can be given supportive treatment for the effects of their reduced immune response.

They can often be maintained for a long time, but once clinically ill, may eventually no longer respond to treatment, and may need to be put to sleep on humane grounds. The highest risk group of cats are unneutered males, as their aggressive territorial behaviour leads to many battles with other unneutered males, resulting in deep infected bite wounds. It follows, naturally, that the best



This old tom is FIV positive and is in a pitiful state because he was constantly fighting.

way to reduce the spread of FIV in the cat population is to neuter as many males as possible. It is also important from a welfare point of view to neuter cats to prevent the appalling injuries sustained during fights. CHAT strongly disagrees with the policy of some charities and veterinary surgeons who automatically euthanase or recommend euthanasia for healthy cats when an FIV positive result is obtained. We welcome the increasing trend amongst veterinary surgeons who are realising that healthy FIV positive cats enjoy a good quality of life.

Many of CHAT's long-term foster homes, staff and volunteers, have a happy mix of FIV positive and FIV negative cats. Our sanctuary in the country currently has forty-three long-term FIV positive cats living amongst the other feline residents. Regular blood tests over the last twelve years have shown that they have not infected the FIV negative cats, even though they spend much time grooming each other and sharing food bowls and litter trays.

Female cats and kittens

Female cats can also be infected with the FIV virus but it is usually acquired as a result of bites during mating. **Kittens born to infected mothers will test antibody positive but should NOT be euthanased as they have FIV antibodies received in their mother's milk.** They should be retested from four months old.



At CHAT, we have to take a realistic overview of the FIV situation. FIV is widespread in the U.K, and is endemic in large cities with high densities of unneutered male cats. In urban areas or areas with a high rate of infection, it seems pointless to confine an FIV positive cat indoors when a large percentage of cats outdoors already carry the virus. Many owned pet cats are FIV positive and their owners are unaware of this. Cats which are tested and have a negative result could be at risk as soon as their owners let them outside again. Since most FIV positive cats are used to going outdoors, we consider it is detrimental to their quality of life to prevent them from going outdoors if they want to, provided that it is in an area where the virus is already present in significant numbers of cats.

In rural areas and those with low rates of FIV infection, the decision on whether to allow an FIV positive cat free access to the outdoors needs to be taken with a view to preventing the spread of FIV locally. If there are any unneutered stray cats, they should be neutered and returned, or rehomed to remove the fighting risk. This will improve their quality of life as well as reducing the risk of contracting FIV if they are not already carrying the virus. Some creative owners have managed to enclose their gardens, or construct interesting, stimulating cat exercise runs, so that their pets can enjoy fresh air.

CHAT blood tests cats for diagnostic purposes and not for screening healthy cats. If a cat has symptoms suggesting FIV, we will test for this. FIV positive cats that are very unwell and do not respond to supportive treatment, are put to sleep to prevent suffering, as would be the case with any cats that came into our care suffering from any terminal disease. Healthy FIV positive cats are rehomed with the full knowledge of the new owners. Provided the cats are not aggressive to other cats, our experiences lead us to believe that there is no reason that they cannot be rehomed with FIV negative cats that are similarly friendly towards other cats.

Basically, a diagnosis of FIV in a healthy cat should not be a death sentence.

CHAT is happy to give advice and answer queries on this subject but for detailed and more technical information about FIV please consult Glasgow University's website www.gla.ac.uk/companion/ofiv.htm Also visit the website of Dr Diane Addie Ph.D., BVMS, ALCM, MRCVS, one of the worlds leading authorities on feline viral disease: www.catvirus.com Dr Addie is one of the Trust's patrons.

Cover photos: Jerry, in the photo on the right, has been FIV positive for the last nine years and is still perfectly healthy.



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Registered Charity Number 293787