



Progressive Animal Welfare Society

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FeLV Facts

What is FeLV?

FeLV stands for “Feline Leukemia Virus”. It is a contagious viral disease that weakens a cat’s immune system which makes it harder for the cat to fight off other diseases. It can predispose the cat to developing other conditions such as cancer, anemia, upper respiratory infections, etc. In the United States, about 2-3% of cats test positive for Feline Leukemia.

How is FeLV transmitted?

FeLV is spread through body secretions, including saliva, nasal secretions, urine, feces, and milk from mother cats. This means that it can be spread through mutual grooming, bites, shared food/water bowls, litterboxes, and nursing. It is only contagious to other cats, not dogs or people. The virus does not survive outside the cat’s body for more than a few hours and is easily killed with regular washing/sanitizing.

How can you tell if a cat has FeLV?

FeLV is detected through a blood test that looks for the presence of certain antibodies in the blood. If a cat tests positive, a confirmatory test can be run which checks to see if the disease has spread to the bone marrow. Once in the bone marrow, the disease is permanent. All cats at PAWS have been tested for FeLV before going up for adoption.

What kind of home does a FeLV + cat need?

They need to only live indoors to prevent the spread of FeLV to other outdoor cats and to keep the FeLV positive cat healthy as long as possible. FeLV positive cats need to be adopted as the only cat in a home or can be adopted into a home with another FeLV positive cat. Even if the existing cat in the home is FeLV negative and has received the FeLV vaccine, there is still a risk to bringing a FeLV positive cat into the household as no vaccine is 100% effective. While all cats require regular veterinary care, a cat with FeLV will require more frequent veterinary care as its disease progresses.

What is the life expectancy for a cat with FeLV?

Because of their weakened immune system, cats with FeLV have a shortened lifespan. The average survival time for cats after FeLV is diagnosed is 2.5 years. There is no cure for FeLV. Cats infected as adults are more likely to live healthier lives and often live longer than cats who were infected as kittens. Although their lifespan is shorter, we believe these cats deserve a chance to spend their lives in loving homes. Thank you for considering opening your heart and home to one of these special cats!

people helping animals