

The Truth About Cat Viruses: FeLV and FIV.



Feral cats are just as healthy as owned cats.

Most feral cats enjoy excellent health and are no more likely to be infected with disease than house cats. In fact, house cats and feral cats contract FeLV and FIV at an equally low rate (about 4%).

FeLV and FIV are not the #1 killers of cats.

Kitten mortality and treatable diseases are also serious health threats. But animal control agencies and shelters nationwide are killing healthy cats—owned, stray, and feral—at an alarming rate.

Spaying and neutering prevents the spread of viruses in all cats.

Spaying and neutering a feral cat colony creates a healthy, stabilized population. And, because neutering reduces or eliminates the primary mode of virus transmission—fighting and breeding—cats already infected pose little risk to other cats, indoors or out.

Cats that test positive can often live healthy, symptom-free lives.

Veterinarians frequently suggest euthanizing FIV-positive cats, but many of these cats can live symptom free for years. FeLV-positive cats may remain in apparent good health for many months, although most succumb sooner. Also, FIV and FeLV tests can be unreliable. Cats testing positive should be re-tested.

What are FeLV and FIV?

FeLV and FIV are incurable viruses that only affect cats. Humans cannot catch or transmit them.

Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)

FeLV is a cancer-causing virus that is transmitted from cat to cat through fighting or mating. FeLV cannot survive for long outside a cat's body and is easily destroyed with most disinfectants and detergents.

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)

FIV suppresses a cat's immune system. It is spread through deep bite wounds. Because sterilized cats fight much less than intact cats, neutered FIV positive cats can generally live safely with uninfected cats both in and outdoors. But, while the risk of transmitting the virus to another cat is very low, it is not nonexistent.

The American Association of Feline Practitioners recommends against routine euthanasia of healthy FeLV- and FIV-positive cats.

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