

FIV Cat Resources

It is always distressing to discover that a pet has a potentially serious health problem, such as feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV). However, this diagnosis isn't nearly as dire as some would believe.

First, FIV is not easily spread. It is transmitted almost exclusively through serious, penetrating bite wounds. When introduced properly into a household with cat-friendly cats, FIV-positive kitties can live safely with FIV-negative kitties.

Second, the majority of FIV-positive cats never become ill and don't generally die from the virus. They are more likely to lose their lives by being euthanized after relinquishment to a shelter. In fact, many vets still recommend euthanasia to clients whose cats test FIV-positive.

At Best Friends, however, our experience with cats who test positive for FIV has been very encouraging. Most FIV-positive cats at the Sanctuary end up living relatively healthy lives, while others only develop mild symptoms that can easily be managed. For more facts about FIV, read [FIV: Catching a Bad Case of Rumors](#) by Kristi Littrell.

We not only adopt out our FIV-positive cats, but some of them go into homes occupied by FIV-negative cats. As long as all the cats in the home have non-aggressive temperaments, there's little danger that the FIV-negative cats will contract the disease. We encourage people to introduce the cats properly and monitor initial interactions between them, just as they would with any new cat. For more information, read [Introducing a New Cat](#).

We also request that the adopters have the blessing of their vets, or be willing to change vets should their current vet not agree with the practice of combining the cats. We've never had a bad report from a home, and no reports of infection or transmission of the virus.

Testing for FIV

A simple blood test called ELISA is the first step in diagnosing FIV, and this test can be done in most veterinary clinics or hospitals. However, for a variety of reasons, cats can have false positives for FIV on the ELISA test, so adult cats who test positive should be retested immediately with the Western Blot (a laboratory test). Both the ELISA and Western Blot detect the presence of antibodies to the virus.

Young kittens born to a FIV-positive mother will inherit the antibodies, but not usually the virus. So, if a kitten tests positive for FIV using the ELISA, it is necessary to wait three to six months before doing the Western Blot, to give time for the inherited antibodies to dissipate before retesting.

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Rehoming

If you must find another home for your cat, consider contacting local vets to see if they have clients with FIV-positive cats or experience with FIV who might be interested in adopting another cat.

Many prospective adopters aren't aware that FIV-negative and FIV-positive cats who get along well can live together safely, so we encourage you to educate them. When seeking a new home for the cat, emphasize that FIV is only spread through serious, penetrating bite wounds and that this cat (if friendly and mellow) would be a great addition to a feline family.

Thankfully, more shelters and humane societies are accepting FIV-positive cats and adopting them out. Check with your local shelter and rescues to find out what their policies are regarding FIV cats. If they don't accept them, help educate them as well. Shelters and rescues might also create a courtesy adoption posting for you on their websites. You can find listings of rescue groups by searching www.petfinder.com; statewide listings for animal organizations can be found at www.worldanimal.net.

Resources

Both Cornell University and the Winn Feline Foundation have comprehensive information about FIV on their websites. Cornell University also has a [veterinary consulting service](#) done by phone for a fee.

Online groups can be excellent resources for learning about living with FIV-positive cats, getting advice on finding a new home for an infected cat, or just being able to talk to someone who understands. Check out these groups:

<http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/FIVCats/>

<http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/PurringPixieCatResource/>