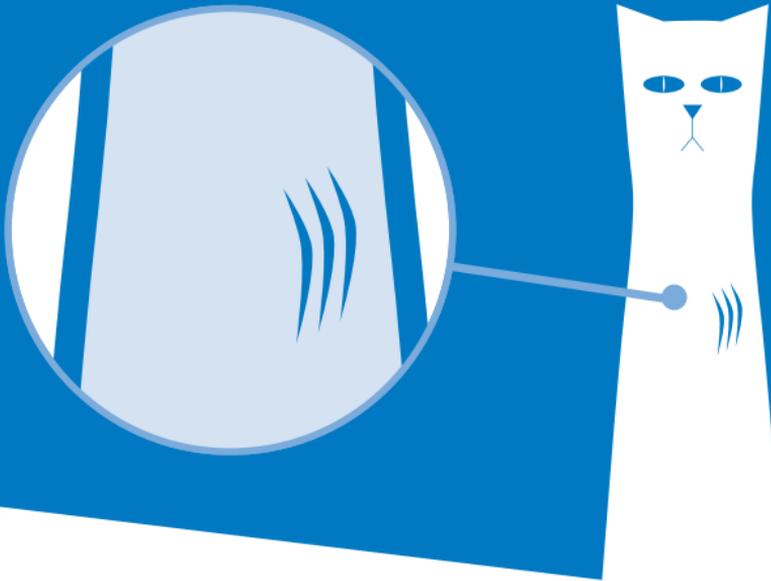


# Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)



**CATS PROTECTION**  
**VETERINARY GUIDES**



*FIV is a virus in cats that is similar to the human virus, HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). However, FIV does not infect humans and HIV does not infect cats.*

## **How do cats catch FIV?**

The virus, present in the blood, saliva and other body fluids of infected cats is very delicate and cannot survive for long periods outside of the cat. For example, it cannot be transferred from cat to cat on people's hands or clothes. It is transmitted primarily by cats fighting, but it can also be passed from an infected female cat to her kittens.

## **Do all cats that get the virus become permanently infected?**

Yes – although a cat will produce antibodies, these are ineffective and once a cat has FIV, he will be FIV positive for the rest of his life.

## **What are the signs of FIV?**

There is an incubation period of months or even years when your cat may be perfectly healthy before signs of infection show. Many infected cats have years of normal life and may die from something else entirely before their FIV infection causes any problems.

Signs of FIV are varied but usually result from a weakened immune system and therefore a vulnerability to other infections. Once disease develops, infected cats may:

- become repeatedly ill, eg with cat flu, sore gums, skin disease or digestive upsets
- simply seem 'off-colour' or have a high temperature
- take a long time to recover from infections
- lose weight
- develop tumours

## How do I have my cat tested for FIV?

Vets can quickly perform a test that detects the antibodies to the virus in blood. It is recommended that positive results (particularly those from otherwise healthy cats) are sent for confirmation using a different test at an external laboratory, as false positive results can occur.

Kittens less than five to six months old may have had antibodies passed on to them by their infected mothers, but not the virus itself. Only a third of kittens born to FIV-positive mothers actually have FIV themselves. Special tests to detect the virus should be performed on such kittens or antibody tests should be repeated when the kittens are five to six months old.

Results can give a false negative if a cat has only recently been exposed to the virus, as it can take up to eight weeks for the cat to produce antibodies. It is recommended that you wait this time before re-testing negative cats if they are known to have had direct contact with other FIV-positive cats. FIV-negative cats should be kept separate from FIV-positive cats during this period.

## Is there any treatment for FIV?

There is currently no reliable treatment for FIV and it is not possible to predict if and when signs may develop. Vets will treat each FIV-positive cat individually, depending on the signs they develop but treatment may involve:

- antibiotics and/or anti-inflammatory drugs as appropriate for secondary recurrent infections
- drugs that may help through direct anti-viral activity
- keeping infected cats indoors, with a good diet and ensuring they are fully vaccinated and regularly treated against fleas and worms will help to protect them from secondary infections, as well as helping to prevent the spread of FIV to other cats

## Will I be able to put my FIV-positive cat in a boarding cattery?

Most catteries will accept FIV-positive cats if they are not showing other signs of infectious disease as aggressive, close contact is required for the virus to be transmitted. The virus is delicate and easily killed by disinfectants, therefore simple precautions and routine cleaning procedures will prevent transmission of the virus in the normal boarding environment.

However, the immune systems of FIV-positive cats may be poor and infections caught while in a cattery could be more serious for them than for an FIV-negative cat. If accommodation is available away from other cats it may reduce the risk of your cat catching a secondary infection.

## Can I protect my cat against FIV?

Unfortunately, there is currently no vaccine for FIV in the UK although, getting your cat neutered reduces their chance of contracting FIV through fighting.

## I have lost my cat to FIV – can I get another cat?

The virus does not survive long in the environment so it is safe to bring a new cat into the house shortly after losing an FIV-positive cat. It is advisable to disinfect the food bowls and litter trays before using them again. If you already have other cats, it is advisable to wait eight weeks and test them for FIV before introducing another cat.

**Cats Protection recommends that FIV-positive cats are kept indoors and only allowed outside in an impenetrable garden or safe run. They should not be allowed direct contact with any FIV-negative cats.**

This leaflet is one of a range provided by Cats Protection on issues surrounding cat care.

Cats Protection is the UK's leading feline welfare charity and helps more than 193,000 cats and kittens each year. We rely entirely on public generosity to finance this vital welfare work.

For more information on **adopting a cat**, **volunteering for us** or **making a donation**, visit **[www.cats.org.uk](http://www.cats.org.uk)**



Cats Protection, National Cat Centre,  
Chelwood Gate, Nr Haywards Heath RH17 7TT

Helpline: 03000 12 12 12 Email: [cp@cats.org.uk](mailto:cp@cats.org.uk)  
Web: [www.cats.org.uk](http://www.cats.org.uk) VET03-2009 **CODE: 4075**

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