

Talking Animals ~South Coast Vet Care

FIV – FELINE AIDS

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) is a viral disease that causes an AIDS-like syndrome in cats. It interferes with the immune system of the cat. It lives in the blood of an infected cat and is carried for life. It is spread by close contact between cats, most commonly by biting as it is shed in high levels in saliva. Sharing water bowls and mutual grooming is unlikely to spread the disease. Occasionally it can be passed from an infected queen to the kittens before they are born or afterwards via the milk.

Infected cats can remain healthy for up to 10 years and show no signs of the disease. Others display initial symptoms such as fever loss of appetite, diarrhoea, lethargy and swollen lymph nodes. As the disease progresses and the immune system starts to fail, signs include weight loss, sores in and around the mouth, eye lesions, poor coat, chronic infections. Eventually the immune system becomes too weak to fight off the infections and these will prove fatal.

About 30% of the sick cats tested here at our clinics are positive for FIV and studies have shown that between 14% and 29% of **all** cats in Australia test positive.

There is no cure for an FIV infected cat and they can only be treated supportively as they show signs. Vaccination is the best way to prevent the disease in an at-risk cat. We recommend testing new cats for FIV before introducing them to a multi-cat household, isolating aggressive cats from others and desexing all cats that are not going to be used for breeding.

Before the first vaccination we recommend testing for FIV. For stray kittens and cats that have been fighting, testing is highly recommended.

A series of 3 vaccination is needed initially, 2 – 4 weeks apart and then a single vaccination given yearly at the same time as annual vaccinations.

Although the virus is related to the human immunodeficiency virus, no human has ever been reported with FIV. It is a disease that only affects cats.