



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FIV

We believe that cats that are positive for the Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) can make excellent companions and deserve the same opportunities for placement as FIV-negative cats. However, there are some things any prospective adopter should know about FIV.

What is FIV?

FIV is an immunodeficiency virus. Though sometimes compared to HIV in humans, FIV cannot be transmitted to humans or other species. In the U.S., approximately 1-2% of cats are FIV-positive. There are different strains of FIV and some seem to be stronger than others. Some cats with FIV live for many years without showing signs; others struggle more frequently with illness related to their FIV status. There is no cure for FIV. A simple blood test determines if a cat is FIV-positive. There is an FIV vaccine that is rarely used, in part because it will cause a cat to test positive for FIV for life. (CAT does not use the FIV vaccine, nor do most private practice vets in the U.S.)

How do cats become infected?

Transmission is almost exclusively through deep, penetrating bite wounds that are the result of intense fighting between intact (unneutered) outdoor cats, especially males. FIV is rarely spread from mother to kittens. FIV is not spread through casual non-aggressive contact between cats. CAT places FIV-positive cats into homes with other (FIV-negative) cats provided neither cat has a history (after neutering) of serious fighting and the cats are properly introduced.

What kind of special care does an FIV-positive cat need?

Many FIV-positive cats live long, healthy lives, but life expectancy can vary. Due to the compromised immune system a cat's life may be shortened if they are FIV-positive.

- FIV-positive cats have more difficulty fighting off disease. They are more prone to dental disease, skin conditions, infections, certain types of cancer, and other health problems. Preventive care is especially important: regular vaccines, veterinary visits every six months, a high-quality diet (raw food is not recommended), and parasite prevention. FIV-positive cats are also more susceptible to stress-related illness. Care should be taken to minimize stress related to events such as moves, owner travel, or changes in the household. Just as with any cat, adopters should be attentive to any signs of illness and seek veterinary care when any concerns arise.
- The outdoors is especially dangerous for an FIV-positive cat because of the exposure to diseases and other dangers. A virus or parasite that another cat might effectively fight off could make an FIV-positive cat seriously ill. FIV-positive cats should be kept indoors.
- As with all cats, CAT recommends introducing FIV-positive cats to other resident cats slowly and carefully over approximately two weeks. This limits stress and helps ensure that the introduction is successful. It also reduces the chance of fighting. Adoption counselors can offer suggestions for a gradual introduction to help ensure success.