

Cat 101

What is Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)?

FIV (similar to HIV in humans) is a virus that weakens a cat's immune system. Learn about FIV, how it spreads, and how you can care for your FIV+ kitty.

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) is a virus that affects the immune system of cats over time. FIV typically has a long asymptomatic phase in which infected cats may remain symptom-free for years and may never develop active disease. However, in some cases, the infection eventually leads to a state of immune deficiency that hinders the cat's ability to protect itself against other infections. The same bacteria, viruses, protozoa, and fungi that may be found in the everyday environment—where they usually do not affect healthy animals—can cause illness in a cat with a weakened immune system. These secondary infections are responsible for many of the diseases associated with FIV.

How does FIV spread?

- FIV is a feline-specific virus. In other words, it is a cat-only disease and cannot be spread to humans or other non-felines.
- FIV is not easily passed between cats. It is not contagious through casual contact like sharing litter boxes, water, or food bowls, or when snuggling and playing.
- FIV typically does not spread from a mother cat to her kittens.
- FIV is almost always spread through penetrating bite wounds. Bite wounds of this kind are extremely rare, except in free-roaming, unaltered cats.
- A spayed or neutered cat in a stable home is extremely unlikely to infect other cats. Santa Barbara Humane Society considers it safe to adopt FIV+ cats to homes with non-FIV cats if the cats are social with each other and the home is stable and stress-free.



When you adopt any cat—including one with FIV—the only guarantee is love and companionship for as long as you are together!

What are the signs of disease caused by FIV?

An infected cat's health may deteriorate progressively or be characterized by recurring illness interspersed with periods of relative health. Signs of immunodeficiency can appear anywhere throughout the body and can appear many years after infection.

How should I take care of my FIV+ cat?

- As with all cats, FIV+ cats should be kept as healthy as possible and fed a high-quality diet.
- FIV+ cats should be kept indoors and free from stress.
- Any suspected health issues should be treated as soon as they arise.

How long can I expect my FIV+ cat to live?

It is impossible to accurately predict the life expectancy of any cat, including those infected with FIV. With appropriate care and under ideal conditions, many infected cats will remain in good health for many years.