



FeLV and FIV Testing

Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)

Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) is a contagious viral disease of cats. While some cats who are exposed to FeLV can clear the infection, other cats become persistently infected for life. FeLV can lead to immune system suppression, infections and cancer. The virus is only contagious between cats and is transmitted primarily through direct contact with saliva and other bodily fluids, including: grooming, shared food and water sources, mother's milk, etc. There is no cure for FeLV; once persistently infected a cat can have a good quality of life for months or many years. Persistently infected kittens are at highest risk for a shortened lifespan. There is an effective vaccine against FeLV, but this is only useful prior to exposure/infection. This vaccine is not administered at Seattle Humane.

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) is a contagious viral disease. Some cats who are infected with FIV never experience any symptoms, while others may be affected by immune system suppression, secondary infections and cancer. While FIV can affect cats of any age or gender, the group most commonly affected are intact male cats who have lived outside. FIV is transmitted most commonly through bite wounds or more uncommonly, through mother's milk and uterine transmission. There is no cure for FIV; with proper care and management, cats may have a good quality of life for many years.

Testing Considerations

The prevalence of FeLV and FIV in the cat population is very low nationwide (1-4% depending on region). Following exposure to either virus, it can take 1-3 months for an infection to develop. One negative test for FeLV or FIV does not guarantee that a cat is truly negative. **All cats should be retested in 3 months, even those adopted with a negative test.** No test is perfect, and false positive test results are possible.

Seattle Humane's Testing Policy

At Seattle Humane, we strive to provide the best care possible for every cat, while also paying close attention to the health of the overall population. We try our best to move cats through our shelter system and into loving homes as quickly as possible to avoid the negative side effects (stress and infectious disease) that come along with longer shelter stays. Seattle Humane does not routinely test cats/kittens for FeLV & FIV, but tests only those cats who show clinical signs consistent with either of these infectious diseases. Testing every single cat is expensive (both in terms of actual cost and staff time), stressful for cats and leads to higher rates of confusing or inaccurate test results.

We recommend you consult with your veterinarian to discuss FeLV/FIV testing. Adopters may choose to have a cat tested by Seattle Humane's veterinary staff. This appointment can be scheduled at the time of adoption for an additional fee. Retesting in 3-6 months is still recommended.