



GIVING A HOME TO AN FIV POSITIVE CAT – Most commonly asked questions

1. What does FIV positive mean?

a) FIV stands for Feline Immunodeficiency Virus. The virus has been associated with cats for many years. FIV is a lentivirus, meaning that it is a slow virus gradually affecting a cat's immune system. The virus depletes the number of white blood cells, which lessens the cat's ability to fight off any infections. The most well-known human lentivirus is HIV but the two are not the same.

Not only domesticated cats as we know of carry the FIV virus. There is a form of FIV that has also been found in 25 other species in the Big Cat population around the world, from the Lions of the Serengeti, Cougars in Wyoming to the Snow Leopards in the Himalayas.

2. How can a cat catch the virus?

a) The virus is largely transmitted by a bite from an infected cat, so it is most commonly found in feral or older un-neutered cats owned or otherwise, as these are the most likely to be involved in fights. FIV can only be transmitted from cat to cat, but NOT TO HUMANS OR OTHER ANIMALS.

It has not been proved that the virus is transmitted sexually, although often the tom cat will hold onto the scruff of the female's neck with his teeth, so if the skin is punctured at that point, transmission is possible. Mutual grooming could pose a small problem but the virus can only live a short time outside a cat's body, it can not be spread casually through litter trays, water or feeding bowls.

FIV cats and non FIV cats can live quite happily together if they get on well. But like all cats, FIV or not, if they don't get on well, they will fight and it would be best for any cats in that situation to be separated.

3. What about a mother cat and her kittens, can she pass on the virus?

a) If a mum cat tests positive it does not necessarily mean that her kittens will have the virus, but it would be advisable to have the kittens tested. This should only be done at three months, otherwise a false negative or positive result could show on the test. It is possible but not common for a mum cat to infect her kittens within the first few weeks of life when grooming them with her infected saliva or through her infected milk.

4. How do I know if my cat has FIV?

a) You don't. Unless your cat appears unwell and you take it to the vet, they may suspect that there is a problem and will then advise a blood test. Once established in a cat's cells, the virus is permanent and no vaccine has yet been proven acceptable.

Signs that a cat has become infected can vary greatly. Often the cat may develop a sign around six to eight weeks after being infected; it may develop a high temperature, sometimes sneezing, snuffling with runny eyes or nose, it may also have diarrhoea. These are also flu-like symptoms, so do not panic; take your cat for a check-up. The eyes can be affected in a number of cases, resulting in conjunctivitis. Gingivitis (gum inflammation) is also something to watch out for, with the mouth becoming quite tender and sore.

5. How long will a cat live with the virus?

a) A cat can live for many years with the virus. Even non FIV cats can become sick and need medical attention. **Not all cats reach old age.** Many FIV positive cats have long and healthy lives. We find that if a cat has been picked up fairly strong and healthy but just tests positive for the virus, it can live a relatively normal life with no apparent health problems from the virus.

6. How can I stop my cat catching the virus?

a) There are no guaranteed ways to prevent any cat catching the FIV virus, but getting your cat neutered to prevent fighting and un-wanted pregnancies will certainly help. Any roaming un-neutered males/females should also be neutered as these are the most likely candidates for the passing on the FIV

virus. Any animal charity would give help and advice on the trapping and neutering of these cats.

7. If I go away, can I put my cat in a cattery?

a) There should be no problems with a cattery boarding an FIV positive cat. FIV is not transmittable through using equipment etc. nor is it air-borne so your cat would not be able to pass on the virus.

You would need to make sure that your cat's vaccinations are well up-to-date as this is something that catteries will insist on whether your cat is FIV positive or not.

8. Why should I give an FIV cat a home?

a) Well why not? This is the most important question of all for our FIV cats waiting patiently and some not so patiently for that well deserved home. They have done their 'time' pounding the streets searching for someone to take them in and care for them.

They are no different from any other cat that you see, only more special, so very special homes are required to meet up to their standards.

A large proportion of cat owners would not be aware that their 'puss' could already have the FIV virus.

Many cat owners do not have their cats neutered early enough and allow him to have 'his bit of fun' or her to have 'just one litter' without realising the dangers this causes their pet. Sadly, some cats never get neutered.

Young male cats are prime targets for getting lost looking for females and then getting into terrible fights over new territory. Infected wounds that turn into large abscesses, torn ears, scratched noses and lost eyes are all a sign of an un-neutered tom cat

By this time, he is many miles from home, having to fend for himself. He has to find his own food and shelter and turns into 'that smelly old tom cat' who keeps coming round and spraying everywhere and is 'such a nuisance' to the neighbourhood.

Sometimes he is lucky and we get a call from someone who is very concerned about this poor old cat in their garden. This poor old cat is normally between 3 - 5 years old and needs medical attention and tests positive for FIV. He could be yours!

They are normally big tom cats with a big personality; they have been out sometime, are normally a bit shy in the beginning but with some tender loving care will turn into loving affectionate cats again. They make the ideal pet as they have done all the wandering they ever want to do and are usually quite happy to just potter around. Some are even nervous of going out, as they fear they will not be allowed back inside again. They will sit by the fire (or radiator) and will delight you with their laid back attitude – "look at me – am I not handsome" and with a big smile on his face will turn around and go right back to sleep again.

Many of the cats we pick up are FIV positive. They are in as much need of good homes as any other cat, if not more so, as these cats are normally shunned by people wanting to adopt a cat from us.

Adopting a cat can be very rewarding, as you can see it develop into a happy cat again.

Remember, even non FIV cats can get health problems at any stage of their lives – there are no guarantees in this life!

If you would be interested in adopting an FIV cat from us, our charity will always offer our support for the cat regarding any health problems that may arise from the virus.

Why not give us a call – we would be pleased to hear from you.

Tel: 020 8348 0045 or 020 8883 6021

If you feel that you would not like an FIV cat we also have many other cats waiting for that very special someone to take care of them and give them a good home. Please call.