



Finally — Vet Study OKs FIV+ and FIV- Cats Living Together

The study in the Veterinary Journal shows FIV is difficult to transmit. How many cats' lives have been lost because people believed the opposite?

JaneA Kelley | Mar 8th 2016

Today in News of the Obvious: FIV-positive cats can live with uninfected fellow felines and not transmit the virus. A veterinary study concludes this. Finally.

Purdue University's College of Veterinary Medicine conducted a long-term study in cat shelters and drew two conclusions: FIV-positive cats can live with FIV-negative cats and not infect the FIV-negative cats during normal day-to-day interaction; and mother cats infected with FIV don't pass the virus on to their kittens. The study was conducted by Dr. Annette L. Litster of the college's Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences.

Cat lovers and rescuers have known this for many years, and they've repeatedly crusaded to stop the superstitions about FIV that have led to who knows how many cats being needlessly killed in shelters.

Misguided beliefs about FIV-positive cats have also led to long stays — sometimes as long as the cat's whole life — for the FIVers lucky enough to be placed in no-kill shelters. There is no need for FIV cats to be adopted only into homes with other FIV-positive cats; the disease is transmitted only by deep bite wounds, which happen only if the cats get into intense fights. Proper introductions and consideration of the individual cats' personalities should go a long way to prevent such fights.



I know this from experience: When I was much younger, my family had a tomcat who developed FIV as a result of fighting for mates with other intact males. But he was never aggressive with his feline housemates. They shared food and water bowls, beds, and sometimes even groomed one another. None of the other cats developed FIV; in fact, his best lady friend, Iris, lived to be 18 and she was very healthy right up until the end of her life.

The false belief that mother cats can pass FIV on to their kittens has probably resulted in thousands upon thousands of unnecessary euthanasias. Although the world certainly has many more cats than it needs, it's a damn shame that so many otherwise adoptable kittens may have died as a result of these incorrect ideas.



Grooming doesn't spread FIV. Two cats grooming one another by Shutterstock

Another problem: People often confuse FIV (the feline immunodeficiency virus) for FeLV (the feline leukemia virus), which *is* transmissible through cohabitation and casual contact. These two diseases are retroviruses and both affect the immune system. The difference? The feline immunodeficiency virus does not easily cross the mucous membranes (the lining of the mouth, nose, eyes, genitals, and intestines), which is why it's so difficult for FIV to be transmitted to other cats.

Proper introductions will prevent fights that lead to injury and possible transmission of FIV. Cats sniffing one another by Shutterstock

There's no need to fear FIV, and I'm delighted that we finally have an official veterinary study that confirms what a lot of us have known for decades. I hope to all things cute and furry that this knowledge spreads rapidly among shelters so they don't unwittingly torpedo their FIVers' chances of being adopted or, worse yet, kill them because of the fear that the disease will spread rapidly.

Thank you, Dr. Litster, for conducting this research and reporting on it: you've already started saving cats' lives.

***About JaneA Kelley:** Punk-rock cat mom, science nerd, animal rescue volunteer and all-around geek with a passion for bad puns, intelligent conversation, and role-play adventure games. She gratefully and gracefully accepts her status as chief cat slave for her family of feline bloggers, who have been writing their award-winning cat advice blog, Paws and Effect, since 2003.*

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<http://www.catster.com/lifestyle/cat-health-vet-study-fiv-positive-cats-living-together>

FIV in Cats FAQs



What is FIV in cats?

FIV stands for feline immunodeficiency virus. It is a lentivirus, the same class of virus as HIV. FIV, which can live in many different tissues in cats, typically causes a weakening of the cat's immune system. However, only cats can get FIV; people and dogs cannot.

How do cats get FIV?

One of the tissues in which FIV lives is the salivary glands, so the most common route of infection is a deep bite wound from a FIV-positive cat to another cat. It can also be transmitted via blood, in utero and possibly from milk from an infected mother cat. It is extremely unlikely, if not impossible, for cats to get FIV from just being around infected cats, from sharing food bowls, or from a person touching a FIV-positive cat and then touching a FIV-negative cat.

What are the signs of FIV infection?

There are no specific signs of FIV infection. FIV-positive cats have a weaker immune system so they are more prone to getting infections such as upper respiratory infections, ringworm and dental disease. Other than that, FIV-positive cats tend to live normal lives and have a normal length of life.

How do I know if my cat has FIV?

There are no obvious signs of FIV so the only way to know is to do a blood test. The most common screening test is an ELISA test (often called a SNAP test) done by your veterinarian, which looks for antibodies to FIV. An antibody is a protein made by the cat in response to FIV infection. A cat can test positive as soon as two to four weeks after exposure, but it can take up to eight weeks. Kittens under six months of age may test positive after having received antibodies from their mothers, either in utero or via milk. It can take up to six months for these antibodies to go away. Thus, it is a good idea to retest a kitten who tests positive after he or she has reached six months of age.

Can FIV be treated?

There are no proven treatments to rid a cat of FIV. Most FIV-positive cats handle the disease well, but it is important to concentrate on treating the secondary illnesses.

What can be done to prevent the spread of FIV?

Cats should be kept indoors so they do not fight with a FIV-positive cat. Depending on where one lives, the rate of FIV-positive cats ranges from 4 to 24 percent. A FIV-positive cat can live with a FIV-negative cat as long as neither cat is a fighter, or the FIV-positive cat has no teeth. (FIV-positive cats commonly have severe dental disease, which often means it is necessary to remove all their teeth.)

There is a vaccine for FIV, but Best Friends does not recommend it because the vaccine does not have the best efficacy and, after a cat is vaccinated for FIV, the cat will test positive for the virus. At

this point, no test can differentiate whether a cat tests positive for FIV from the vaccine or from having the infection. If a cat escapes and is picked up by local animal control, and then tested, the cat may be killed because he or she tests positive.

Can FIV-negative and FIV-positive cats live together?

Yes, as long as the cats get along and do not fight. The risk that a FIV-positive cat could spread the virus to a FIV-negative cat can be minimized by having them live in separate rooms until you are confident that they will not fight with each other.

Can FIV-positive cats have a good and long life?

FIV-positive cats can live normal lives both in quality and duration. They do take special care in terms of monitoring them for signs of infection and they do have a tendency to have bad dental disease.

Information provided at: <http://bestfriends.org/resources/fiv-cats-faqs>



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