

# AAFP releases updated feline retrovirus guidelines to the veterinary community

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On Thursday, January 9, The American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) releases updated Feline Retrovirus Testing and Management Guidelines to the veterinary community, which will be published in the *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*. In publishing these Guidelines, the AAFP aims to provide the most current

information about feline retrovirus infections to veterinary practitioners so they may optimize the care and management of their feline patients.

In addition, the Client Brochure provides cat caregivers with information regarding transmission, testing, prevalence, and precautions. These Guidelines focus on feline leukemia virus (FeLV) and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) infections, which are found in cats worldwide. The spread of these viruses can be minimized through education, testing, and vaccinations.

The updated Guidelines represent a consensus of current information compiled by an international panel of researchers and practitioners, and is an update of the AAFP's heavily referenced 2008 Retrovirus Testing and Management Guidelines.

"Education and early testing can greatly assist in the treatment and management of feline retrovirus infections. Routine veterinary care, when cats are well and when they are sick, can lead to better care and decrease the spread of [infection](#). We are pleased to present these Guidelines to support both veterinary professionals and cat caregivers in the management of these illnesses. We further stress the partnership between veterinarians and cat owners in caring for infected cats because with regular healthcare and reduced stress, cats infected with retroviruses, especially FIV, may live many healthy years," said Heather O'Steen, CEO, AAFP.

"The 2020 Feline Retrovirus Testing and Management Guidelines contain much new information about feline leukemia and feline immunodeficiency virus infections. The Guidelines were written by an international panel of experts and included not only retrovirus researchers, but veterinarians working in private practice and in shelters. We hope these Guidelines will be of practical use for all veterinarians. The panel is especially proud to have endorsement of the Guidelines by

the International Society of Feline Medicine," said Retrovirus Guidelines Co-Chair Susan Little, DVM, DABVP (Feline).

Julie Levy, DVM, Ph.D., DACVIM, DABVP (Shelter Medicine) added, "These guidelines address rapidly evolving knowledge about how testing results, clinical expression, and prognosis for FeLV may change over time relative to the cat's current immune response and resulting levels of virus in circulation, how quantitative testing may be used to better inform clinical decision-making, and an emerging trend in which screening for FeLV and FIV is increasingly shifting from animal shelters, where cats are adopted, to veterinary practices, where animals receive comprehensive care."

## **More About Retroviruses:**

These Guidelines and Client Brochure represent current knowledge on the pathogenesis, diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of retrovirus infections in cats. Infections with FeLV and FIV are associated with a variety of clinical signs and can impact quality of life and longevity. Although vaccines are available for FeLV in many countries and for FIV in some countries, identification of infected cats remains an important factor for preventing new infections. The [retrovirus](#) status of every cat at risk of infection should be known. Cats should be tested as soon as possible after they are acquired, following exposure to an infected cat or a cat of unknown infection status, prior to vaccination against FeLV or FIV, and whenever clinical illness occurs. It might not be possible to determine a cat's infection status based on testing at a single point in time; repeat testing using different methods could be required. Although FeLV and FIV infections can be associated with clinical disease, some infected cats, especially those infected with FIV, can live for many years with good quality of life. There is a paucity of data evaluating treatments for infected cats, especially antiretroviral and immunomodulatory drugs. Management of infected cats is focused on effective preventive health

care strategies and prompt identification and treatment of illness, as well as limiting spread of infection.

## **Prevalence and the Spread of Retroviruses in Cats:**

**FIV:** Feline immunodeficiency virus is more commonly found in male cats and cats that fight with other cats. It is found less often in kittens and neutered adult cats. The virus is spread primarily through saliva and is usually passed to other cats by bite wounds. In North America, about 3 to 5% of tested cats are found to be infected with FIV.

**FeLV:** Feline leukemia virus infection is more commonly spread from mother to kittens. The virus can also be spread between cats that live together or those that fight. It is mainly spread in saliva during grooming and when food and water bowls are shared. The virus is less often spread through urine, feces, or nasal discharge. In North America, 4% of tested cats are found to be infected with the virus.

## **Prevention:**

There are no vaccines marketed in the United States or Canada that can protect cats from FIV infection.

Vaccines to protect cats from FeLV infection are available. The vaccine is recommended for all kittens, again one year later, and for cats that have ongoing risk of infection. Adult indoor-only cats living alone or with uninfected cats may not need to be vaccinated after the first two years. Veterinarians will help assess an individual cat's vaccination needs.

**More information:** Susan Little et al, 2020 AAFP Feline Retrovirus Testing and Management Guidelines, *Journal of Feline Medicine and*

*Surgery* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/1098612X19895940](https://doi.org/10.1177/1098612X19895940)

To access the Feline Retrovirus Guidelines, visit [catvets.com/retroviruses](https://catvets.com/retroviruses). Cat caregivers can learn more about feline retroviruses at [catfriendly.com/felv](https://catfriendly.com/felv) and [catfriendly.com/fiv](https://catfriendly.com/fiv).

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