



## Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) and Feline Leukaemia Virus (FeLV)

FIV and FeLV are found only in cats and at present there is no evidence to suggest they can affect other species. They are very similar in their disease process and transmission. Once infected with either virus a cat will remain infected for its whole life. Some cats can live a relatively normal life despite being infected but they can still spread the disease. The virus causes problems with the cats immune system, leaving them susceptible to other diseases and infections. Because of this, the signs of FIV and FeLV are quite non-specific. Cats may become lethargic, have a decreased appetite, show respiratory disease, infected mouths, vomiting and diarrhoea, generally what you would expect of a cat with a reduced immune system. Some cats may recover from these symptoms initially but usually go downhill again soon after. In some cases cats with FIV and FeLV are more susceptible to some types of tumour. In feral colonies, where the diseases are present, female cats will be more likely to abort and any kittens born may be weakly.

FIV and FeLV are spread in saliva so biting during cat fights is one of the main routes of infection. They can also be spread during mutual grooming, mating and from mother to offspring. This obviously makes it a common condition in feral cat colonies which have wandering tom cats and un-controlled breeding.

To diagnose FIV and FeLV a blood sample has to be taken. If the cat is already showing signs of disease then the outlook is poor. Cats who are not ill may remain healthy for long periods but, as stated previously, can be a source of infection to others. To this end, virus positive cats should be kept indoors, and not allowed to roam freely. They will at some point require medication and supportive therapy. This is not usually an option for feral cats and in the long term it is usually kinder to put these cats to sleep.

Prevention is always better than cure. Neutering plays a huge part in the control of these diseases. Neutered tom cats are less likely to wander, less likely to fight and definitely less likely to breed!! Neutered females won't breed and are less enticing to the wandering toms. A neutered colony is usually a healthier colony.