Foster – FeLV

**What is Feline Leukemia (FeLV)?**

FeLV is found around the world, and in the United States about 2-3% of cats are FeLV positive. Rates of transmission increase due to risk factors like age, health and environment. It is what is known as a “retrovirus”, in the same family, but a much different disease than FIV. It eventually attacks the immune system leaving cats vulnerable to other infections and disease, like cancer.

**How is it spread?**

It is spread by other cats infected with FeLV through their saliva, nasal secretions, urine, feces and milk from mother cats -- by way of mutual grooming, bites, shared feeding bowls and litter boxes, and nursing. The virus does not survive for long outside the body and can be easily killed in the environment through regular washing/sanitizing. Your FeLV positive foster cat should not come into contact with any other cats inside, or outside, of the home.

**Can people or dogs catch FeLV?**

No. FeLV can only be transmitted to other cats. People and dogs (bunnies and other species) cannot contract FeLV. Cats with FeLV should not live with FeLV negative cats, as the disease is easily spread cat to cat. There is however, a vaccine available to protect healthy cats from becoming infected with the virus.

**What quality of life can be expected for a FeLV cat?**

FeLV is a much more complicated disease than has been understood previously. Cats can experience a happy, high quality of life for months or years after infection. Some cats have been known to live into their teens. Kittens tend to succumb to the disease within a year or so. Unfortunately testing cannot currently tell us the stage of disease progression.

**What about my foster cat?**

Your foster cat can live a happy normal life as an indoor cat in your foster home. Unless directed otherwise, they do not require special medications or a special diet. They will need to come to the shelter at a minimum twice annually for a general checkup if they have not been adopted. However, FeLV is a very unpredictable disease and a FeLV positive cat can become very sick, very fast once the immune system is compromised. For that reason, if you notice any changes in your foster cat such as lethargy, decreased appetite, difficulty breathing, or sudden onset of any new concerns, the Foster Care Manager should be contacted.

**Non-emergent concerns**, please email [Fosters@hshv.org](mailto:Fosters@hshv.org) or call 734-661-3520

**For emergencies**, please contact the foster emergency number 734-717-4424