



## **FIV+ CATS**

### **What is FIV?**

FIV stands for Feline Immunodeficiency Virus. It is classified as a lentivirus, which means it has a long, slow incubation period, similar to HIV in humans. FIV can live in many different tissues in cats, and typically causes a gradual weakening of the cat's immune system over time.

### **How do cats get FIV? What are the risks of transmission?**

The most common method of transmission of FIV is through deep penetrating bite wounds. Transmission is typically between intact stray male cats is territorial disputes. Less common methods of transmission include transmission via blood, in utero, and from milk from an infected mother cat to her kittens. Casual, non aggressive contact does not appear to be an efficient route of spreading FIV; as a result, cats in households with stable social structures where housemates do not fight are at little risk for acquiring FIV infections. Scientists have studied homes and shelters where FIV+ and FIV- cats are cohoused and have found that when all inhabitants are spayed and neutered, transmission occurrence is next to none. There are also many anecdotal accounts from cat owners who have had FIV+ and FIV- cats in their homes for years without transmission, even when mutual grooming and play biting behavior are observed.

### **What are signs of FIV infection?**

Cats can live for many years with the virus without showing any symptoms. Once the virus has taken hold, a cat may become more prone to secondary infections. Even though there are no specific signs of the FIV infection, FIV + cats are more likely to experience upper respiratory infections, ringworm, and dental disease. These are diseases that any cat may contract; the difference is that FIV+ cats may experience a faster progression of the disease, so they should be treated sooner, rather than later.

### **Are there any restrictions to adopting an FIV + Cat?**

- Your family and canine friends cannot catch FIV, it is species-specific to cats only.
- Care should be taken to make sure your new cat and any existing cats are a good personality match for each other, and follow introduction recommendations.

- We recommend that you may wish to keep your FIV+ cat indoors only, to help prevent him or her from contracting diseases from the environment or community. There are diseases endemic to Sonoma County such as Leptospirosis which can be contracted in your own backyard. However, quality of life is important too! Most FIV+ cats we find are couch potatoes and happy to be indoor-only, but if your kitty is crazy to get outside, weigh the pros and cons and make the educated decision you feel is in your cat's best interest. We're here to help you and advise you if you need any help.

### **Can FIV + cats live a normal life? Why does Sonoma Humane Society adopt out FIV + Cats?**

We believe that FIV is not a death sentence. We recognize that while cats with FIV need special care, they usually live long, healthy lives and deserve a chance like any other cat. An FIV + cat can live a normal life both in quality and duration with a little monitoring. If you have, or would like to adopt an FIV + cat, here's what to do:

- Watch for any health changes in your cat, keeping an especially close watch on dental and mouth health.
- Bring your cat in for regular vet visits.
- Feed your cat a nutritious diet.
- Give your cat lots of love.

Don't forget that the Humane Society of Sonoma County is always here for you to help you with any questions you may have regarding providing a happy, healthy life for your feline family members!