

### Feline Leukemia FAQ

FelV, or Feline Leukemia Virus, is a virus that affects the immune system of a cat. It isn't a form of cancer, but is a virus that may weaken the immune system and may make opportunistic infections and certain types of cancer more likely. Cats with FelV can live normal, happy lives—they may just have a shorter life expectancy than FelV negative cats. Historically, cats with this disease have been euthanized the minute they are diagnosed. Austin Pets Alive! has taken a different stance, allowing FelV cats to live with dignity and be adopted into loving homes—however, we can only continue to save these cats if people are willing to foster and adopt them.

#### **Is FelV Contagious?**

Only to other cats. For this reason, it is required that FelV+ cats are kept indoors only. They can only cohabitate with other FelV+ cats as it is spread from cat to cat via prolonged, direct contact with an infected cat's saliva (sharing food bowls, grooming each other, etc.), urine, blood, and from queen to kittens during pregnancy. Feline leukemia is species specific, so other animals such as dogs cannot contract the virus. The virus itself is not airborne and dies rapidly in the environment, so you won't have to worry about carrying the virus on clothes when you leave the house or have friends over.

#### **Are the FelV+ cats available for adoption sickly?**

No. The FelV+ cats appear and act just as healthy as the other cats we have available for adoption. They do, however, have an increased risk of getting sick. This makes protecting them from stress, feeding a high quality diet, and addressing health problems as soon as they arise critical. You wouldn't know a cat had FelV by just looking at it, and many people have FelV+ cats in their home and don't even know it because they never got them tested.

#### **How long do FelV+ cats live?**

It can be hard to say! There are stages of FelV which may impact lifespan, and a cat's viral load may change over time. From available research, progressively infected FelV+ cats often live between 2-6 years after diagnosis if they were diagnosed as adults, and 6 months-2 years after diagnosis if they were diagnosed as kittens. Regressively infected cats are showing normal lifespans in research studies. However, it is possible for FelV+ cats to live both shorter and longer lives than the ranges we've listed here; every cat is unique. The most important thing to remember is that no matter how much time they have, it will be better because they're with you in a loving home.

#### **Do FelV+ cats need special medication or care?**

Not while they are healthy. If/when they do eventually get sick, they will often get very sick quickly and may need more care than a normal cat since their immune system may be hampered. This is why APA! offers complimentary care of illnesses that may arise due to a cat's feline leukemia status.

### **Why do shelters usually automatically euthanize FeLV+ cats?**

There are many myths out there about feline leukemia. As a result, it can be challenging to find people willing to adopt or foster FeLV+ cats. Some organizations feel this is more than they can handle or that they do not have the resources to shelter these cats.

### **I'm still not sure. Can you give me more information?**

Yes!! We would be more than happy to talk to you about the FeLV+ cats in our program and about the virus. If you would like more information please email [felv@austinpetsalive.org](mailto:felv@austinpetsalive.org) and let us know you are interested in more information on FeLV+ cats.

# FeLV Post Adoption Treatment Coverage

## Adopting a FeLV+ Cat From Austin Pets Alive!

If you are interested in adopting a FeLV+ cat from Austin Pets Alive!, please know that they come with waived adoption fees and that the APA! medical clinic will provide complementary treatment related to their FeLV status and in line with palliative care policies. In the category of palliative care, heroic measures such as hospitalization, advanced imaging, specialist referrals, and invasive surgery would not be pursued. Minimal laboratory or other diagnostic tests may be warranted. Pain medication, supplements, prescription diets, or other medications to treat chronic conditions would be utilized. The focus for these patients is on quality of life.

## What Medical Care Is Provided by APA! Post Adoption?

After adoption, the APA! medical clinic will see patients for the following *potentially* FeLV related symptoms:

- Fever
- Upper respiratory infections (colored nasal discharge in combination with loss of appetite and/or eye discharge with eye squinting )
- Labored breathing
- Inappetence/anorexia - if you suspect your cat has not eaten in 24 hours, offer different kinds of wet food (start with the smelliest), chicken or turkey baby food (without onions or garlic), or even scrambled eggs. Please set up an appointment with the APA! clinic or your private vet if your cat is still not eating after 48 hours.
- Unexplained weight loss and/or lethargy - if your usually energetic and outgoing kitty is now withdrawn and/or unwilling to play, it could be an indicator that something is wrong!
- Lymphoma or other cancers (for hospice and end-of-life care)
- Anemia (for hospice and end-of-life care)
- Dehydration

The APA medical clinic is a non-profit shelter clinic, and therefore **not a full service** clinic.

However, we are able to provide the following treatments and/or diagnostics for adopted FeLV cats:

- Supportive care:
  - At the time of the appointment - fluids under the skin, vitamin b12, anti-nausea medications
  - Prescription pain medications, appetite stimulants, anti-inflammatory medications, and if a bacterial infection is noted on exam, antibiotics (at vet's discretion)
- For terminal conditions, euthanasia when quality of life has declined

**Common Terminal Conditions:** FeLV cats can be susceptible to terminal (incurable) disease processes such as cancer/lymphoma, terminal anemia, and fluid production within their belly and/or chest (FIP). At your appointment with the APA Medical Clinic, a veterinarian will examine your pet to screen them for FeLV-related conditions, including these. If warranted based on the exam, we will do a small blood test to check for anemia and/or xrays of the chest to screen for cancer. Once a presumptive diagnosis is determined, we can provide supportive-care medications based on symptoms. If a terminal diagnosis is made, APA will provide end-of-life care including euthanasia when the time comes. If further diagnostics or treatments are desired, you will need to follow up with your private vet. APA Veterinarians see more feline leukemia cats than any other clinic in the nation. We are very accurate in our diagnostics and treatment of felv disorders. Rest assured that your cat will get a proper and honest assessment. If you need further support or have questions, please reach out to [felv@austinpetsalive.org](mailto:felv@austinpetsalive.org).

**Please contact the APA! medical clinic via email at [medicalreception@austinpetsalive.org](mailto:medicalreception@austinpetsalive.org) or by phone at 512-466-0720 if you notice any of these issues with your feline leukemia**

**positive cat. APA! will not reimburse medical expenses for the above items if you opt to go to a private vet.**

### **What Medical Care Would I Need to See a Private Vet For?**

APA! will not treat adopted FeLV cats for the following post adoption:

- Vaccines, flea preventatives, deworming, or other routine care
- Dental or gum disease
- Traumatic injuries such as broken bones, soft tissue injuries, lameness
- Diarrhea or other GI conditions such as IBD, or food allergies,
- Ingestion of toxins, or foreign bodies
- Skin conditions
- Ear infections
- Urinary tract infections/Urinary blockages
- Skin masses unrelated to lymphoma
- Constipation
- General age maladies such as arthritis, kidney disease, diabetes, heart disease

## **Are There Any Local Veterinarians Familiar With FeLV?**

Yes! The following are a few local veterinarians who have experience treating cats with feline leukemia:

- **Corner Vet**  
2400 E Cesar Chavez Austin, TX 78702  
(512) 236-8000
- **Lake Austin Blvd Animal Hospital**  
2301 Lake Austin Blvd, Austin, TX 78703  
(512) 474-8888
- **Riverside Veterinary Clinic**  
2400 E. Oltorf Austin, TX 78741  
512-444-3111
- **South Austin Cat Hospital**  
11215 S. IH-35 #109 Austin, TX 78747  
512-910-2287

# FeLV End of Life Care Information

Though no one wishes to think about losing the cat they are adopting, we want to ensure that our FeLV adopters feel both prepared and supported given the shortened average lifespan of FeLV+ cats.

## Terminal Illness and End of Life Care

When FeLV+ cats reach the end of their lives, it is most commonly a rapid decline where the cat goes from seemingly well to terminal in a matter of days or weeks. At that point, the goal is to determine if the cat has reached end of life, and then to prevent and alleviate their suffering if so. APA! may examine and perform non-invasive testing to help determine the stage of health, as well as listening to your feedback on the cat's quality of life. If the cat has reached known markers of terminal illness, such as severe anemia or anorexia, APA! will offer complimentary and humane end of life services at that time.

If you elect to continue lifesaving efforts after a euthanasia recommendation, APA! will do our best to make the cat comfortable, help you understand what to expect, and refer you to your private veterinarian. If you choose euthanasia with APA!, we encourage you to be present during the humane euthanasia of your adopted cat for his or her comfort. All euthanasia at APA! is performed by licensed veterinarians and you will have privacy in an examination room of our Medical Clinic.

Afterward, you may take your cat home for burial, APA! can arrange for your pet to be communally cremated at no cost, or you may pay for private cremation if you would like to receive your cat's ashes back. Our clinic receptionists will assist you in this decision.

You may also elect in-home euthanasia at your own expense. Many find this option more comfortable for themselves, as well as their cat. Below are private, in-home euthanasia providers recommended by the APA! Cat Staff:

- Compassionate Pet Vet  
(512) 553-1331  
compassionatepetvet.com
- Healing Arts Veterinary House Calls  
(512) 576-0929  
healingartshousecalls.com
- Doorstep Vet  
(512) 387-1555  
doorstepvetaustin.com

## Grief Support

We're committed to supporting our FeLV+ adopters from the moment you first met your cat, to the moment you say goodbye. The APA! FeLV program is always here to help. Please feel free to reach out to us at [felv@austinpetsalive.org](mailto:felv@austinpetsalive.org), or utilize any of the grief support resources below:

- ASPCA Grief Support Hotline  
877-GRIEF-10
- Association of Pet Loss and Bereavement  
aplb.org
- Austin Pet Loss Support Group  
2nd Wednesday of each month, 7:15-8:30pm  
@ The Healing House Studio, 701 Morrow St, Austin, TX 78752  
[nicolevykoul.com/austin-pet-loss-support](http://nicolevykoul.com/austin-pet-loss-support)