FeLV

1. BACKGROUND

Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV), is a virus that attacks the immune system of a cat. It isn't a form of cancer, but is actually a virus that weakens the immune system. Cats with FeLV can live normal, happy healthy lives—they just have a much shorter life expectancy than FeLV negative cats. Historically cats with this disease have been euthanized as soon as they are diagnosed. Austin Pets Alive! has taken a different stance, allowing FeLV cats to live out the time left to them with dignity.

2. FAQ

Is FeLV contagious?
Only to other cats. For this reason it is recommended that FeLV+ cats are kept indoors only. They can only cohabitate with other FeLV+ cats as it is spread from cat to cat via saliva (sharing food bowls, grooming each other, etc.), urine, blood, and from mother cat 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.

How is FeLV diagnosed?
The screening for FeLV is generally an ELISA snap test (often in combination with the feline immunodeficiency [FIV] test). All APA! cats available for adoption were tested for FIV and FeLV via this method. False positives do occasionally occur with these tests, so APA! may retest the cat at a later date or submit blood for further laboratory diagnostics. Cats older than 1 year of age who test negative tend to remain negative, even with exposure, due to natural resistance to infection at that age.

Are the FeLV+ cats available for adoption sickly?
No. The FeLV+ cats APA! have available are just as healthy as the other cats available for adoption. They do, however, have an increased risk of getting sick. This makes protecting them from stress, feeding a high quality diet, taking them to the vet regularly, and addressing health problems as soon as they arise absolutely 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.

Do FeLV+ cats need special medication or care?
Not while they are healthy. When and if they do eventually get sick they will usually get very sick quickly and may need more care than a normal cat since their immune system doesn't work as well. Some vet clinics recommend keeping FeLV+ cats on anti-viral drugs to help keep the virus from replicating, though the efficacy of these drugs is debatable. APA! provides care for illnesses related to the virus free of charge for our FeLV+ cats.

Why do shelters usually euthanize FeLV+ cats?
There are many myths out there about feline leukemia. As a result, it is often difficult to find people willing to adopt or foster FeLV+ cats. The cats in the APA! program have usually been here for several

months hoping to find homes. Most organizations don't have the time and resources available to keep these cats for the long haul. While APA! currently has the ability to continue saving these cats, we must continue to grow our FeLV foster program to ensure that their lives are not spared in the future.

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 the APA! program and about the disease. If you would like more information, please email adopt@[yourdomain] and let them know you are interested in more information on FeLV+ cats.

3. Adopting a FeLV+ cat from APA!
If you're interested in adopting any of these special cuties, know that their adoption fee is waived and that the APA! medical clinic will provide treatment for illnesses related to their FeLV+ status.

Palliative treatment can range from weeks or months to years and is utilized for FeLV+ cats. APA! defines palliative care as the care of patients with a life-limiting illness that is not responsive to curative treatment or where curative treatment is not available or not applicable due to concurrent medical conditions, age, or other risk factors. Control of pain and other symptoms and frequent measuring of quality of life (appetite, activity, interaction with family members, pain assessment, hygiene) is paramount to optimal care. The goal of palliative care is achievement of the best quality of life for individual patients.

In the categories 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 and other available 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 issues should I look for post-adoption?

Moving into a new home can be stressful for cats since they thrive on familiarity and consistency. Be aware that cats are generally very skilled at hiding their pain and discomfort. Prolonged stress can, in turn, lead to illness. If you adopt a FeLV+ cat, it's important to be aware of the symptoms of common stress-related illnesses that can appear post-adoption.

- Not eating – 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. Contact APA! if your cat is still not eating after 48 hours as it can be dangerous for their health. Three or more days is too long.
- Fever
- Sneezing
- Yellow or green nasal discharge
- Congestion
- Labored breathing
- Lethargy – your new cat should be inquisitive yet shy. If he/she is unwilling to play that could be a sign that they are getting sick.

Contact the APA! medical clinic via email at medtechs@[yourdomain] or by phone at ###-#### if you notice any of these issues with a new FeLV+ cat.

For routine care such as skin issues, diarrhea, dental/extractions, etc., see your regular veterinarian.