

american PETS alive!

FeLV Toolkit

Description:

Looking for FeLV resources? SOPs? Policies. Here is everything you need to create a FeLV adoption program in your community!

What's included in this toolkit:

[Austin Pets Alive! FeLV FAQ](#) - for staff, volunteers and adopters

[Austin Pets Alive! FeLV Protocols](#) - Testing protocols for your program

[Austin Pets Alive! FeLV Testing Schedule](#) - Details for setting a testing schedule for your program

[Austin Pets Alive! FeLV Post Adoption Treatment Coverage](#) - Details about what adopters receive when they adopt FeLV cats from Austin Pets Alive!

[Austin Pets Alive! Think FeLV First Flyer](#) - Example adoption promotion flyer

FeLV FAQ

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 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.

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@austinpetsalive.org and let them know you are interested in more information on FeLV+ cats.

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@austinpetsalive.org or by phone at 512-466-0720 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.

Local Resources (Austin Area)

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

<u>Corner Vet</u> 2400 E Cesar Chavez Austin, TX 78702 (512) 236-8000	<u>VCA Ben White Animal Hospital</u> 2417 W Ben White Austin, TX 78704 (512) 444-7518	<u>Central Texas Cat Hospital</u> 2111 Sam Bass Rd. Round Rock, TX 78681 (512) 388-1299
<u>Lake Austin Blvd Animal Hospital</u> 2301 Lake Austin Blvd. Austin, TX 78703 (512) 474-8888	<u>Riverside Veterinary Clinic</u> 2400 E Oltorf Austin, TX 78741 512-444-3111	<u>Westgate Pet & Bird Hospital</u> 4534 W Gate Blvd. Austin, TX 78745 (512) 892-4463
<u>VCA Northwest Hills</u> 3426 Greystone Dr. Austin, TX 78731 (512) 345-5067		

Additional Information

For questions regarding this policy, contact document owner.

Testing Protocols for FeLV Positive Cats

Cats

- If FELV positive on whole blood, retest using serum. Spin down .5-1mL of blood. Be careful not to lyse the cells when drawing blood.
- If cat has a positive test on file from a sending shelter - REGARDLESS of whether it is FIV or FeLV - whole blood test should be skipped and serum should be run immediately on intake.
- If cat is negative on serum on intake, cat is negative. No further testing is needed.
- Cats who are negative but have been with positive cats (siblings, kennelmates, etc.) should be considered exposed, kept separate from other cats for 30 days, and tested individually on serum at that time. If negative at retest consider negative. If Positive on retest test again in 30 days to confirm positive.

Nursing or Pregnant Moms

- Mothers and kittens should be tested separately. Do not rely on the diagnostic test result of a mother cat to determine the FeLV status of her kittens.

Bottle Baby Kitten (Neonatal)

- If whole blood positive or has positive test from sending shelter, spin down .5-1mL blood and retest using serum only. Test individually.
 - Kittens should be separated based on negative or positive status.
 - Kittens who are negative but have been with positive cats (siblings, Mother, etc.) should be considered exposed, kept separate from other cats for 30 days, and tested individually on serum at that time. If negative at retest consider negative. If positive on retest test again in 30 days to confirm positive.

For All Cats Serum Positive on Intake:

- Retest using serum one month from the time of initial positive APA serum test, regardless of age of cat
- If positive at time of retest, consider cat to be positive. No further testing is needed.
 - Singular exception is for kittens under 6 months. If still with us or unaltered, retest at 6 months or at time of SX.
- If negative at time of retest, separate cat from other cats and retest in two weeks.
 - If negative at two weeks, consider cat to be negative. No further testing is needed.

Feline Leukemia Test Schedule

Austin Pets Alive believes that every kitten or cat diagnosed with Feline Leukemia deserves the same life quality as cats that do not have Feline Leukemia. Below are the guidelines APA! takes to ensure that all felines are tested conclusively.

Kittens 6 months or younger:

- 1st positive test – if not tested at APA repeat test using serum. Test all kittens in a litter individually. If some are negative and some are positive they need to be split up. Negative kittens are considered “FeLV Exposed” and will need to be retested on Serum in 30 days to confirm their Negative FeLV status.
- 2nd positive test – should be 4 weeks after 1st positive test. Serum test individually. If negative then retest in 2-4 weeks to confirm Negative FeLV status.
- 3rd positive test – At 6 months of age or at spay/neuter surgery serum test individually. If positive then should be considered definitely FeLV Positive and no re-testing is needed. If Negative retest in 2-4 weeks to confirm Negative.

**Cats previously positive at APA on SERUM need at least 2 negative diagnostic serum tests on file to be considered officially negative. Once 2 tests are on file the cat is considered to be definitively negative and cannot revert to positive.

See vet for questionable results.

Cats 7 months or older:

1. 1st positive test – if not tested at APA should be retested using serum. Litter/housemates should be tested individually. If negative then initial test should be discounted and no further testing is needed. If positive then retest in 4 weeks.
2. 2nd positive test – if negative retest in 2-4 weeks to confirm negative. If positive then should be considered definitively FeLV positive.

Negative kittens can have spay/neuter surgery asap.

Moving to the FeLV Ward and spay/neuter should be postponed as long as possible for positive kittens. Positive kittens will not be spayed/neutered until 5-6 months old and should not go to the FeLV adoption center until at least 10 months of age.

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 complimentary 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?

The APA! medical clinic will see patients for the following FeLV related illnesses post adoption:

- Dehydration
- Fever
- Yellow or green nasal or eye discharge
- Respiratory issues including upper respiratory infections, labored breathing, or congestion
- 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. Contact APA! if your cat is still not eating after 48 hours as it can be dangerous for their health. Three or more days could be too long!
- Lethargy - if your usually energetic and outgoing kitty is suddenly withdrawn and unwilling to play, it could be an indicator that something is wrong!
- Lymphoma or other cancers
- Anemia

Please contact the APA! medical clinic via email at medtechs@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 for medical care instead of the APA! medical clinic.

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 non-cancerous GI conditions such as IBD, or food allergies, or foreign bodies in the GI tract
- Skin conditions
- Ear infections
- Urinary tract infections/Urinary blockages
- Skin masses
- Constipation
- General age maladies such as arthritis, kidney disease, diabetes, heart disease

Please see a private vet for any of the above medical concerns.

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

Think **FeLV** First

Only wants 1 cat
Has no other cats
Wants to help a special cat
Wants free veterinary care