

What is *Feline Panleukopenia*?

Feline Panleukopenia (FP) is a highly contagious viral disease of cats caused by the feline parvovirus. Over the years FP has been known by a variety of names including feline distemper, infectious enteritis, cat fever and cat typhoid. Feline distemper should not be confused with canine distemper. Though sharing the same name, they are different diseases caused by different viruses; neither of the viruses is transmissible to man. FP virus kills rapidly dividing body cells. This cell loss makes the cat more susceptible to other complications and bacterial infections.



How *Can You Tell if a Cat has FP?*

The signs of FP are variable and can mimic other disorders. Many owners may even believe that their cat has been poisoned or has swallowed a foreign object.

The first signs an owner might notice are generalized depression, loss of appetite, high fever, lethargy, vomiting, severe diarrhea, dehydration or hanging over the water dish. Normally, the sickness may go on for three or four days after the first elevation of body temperature. Fever will fluctuate during the illness in some cats and abruptly fall to subnormal levels shortly before death.

How *Do Cats Become Infected With The FP Virus?*

Infection occurs when cats come in contact with the blood, urine, fecal material, nasal secretions, and even fleas of infected cats. Pregnant females that contract the disease, even in its mildest form, may give birth to kittens with severe brain damage. In most cases, recovered cats do not transmit the infection.

A cat can become infected without ever coming in direct contact with an infected cat. Bedding, cages, food dishes and the hands or clothing of handlers may harbor and transmit the virus.

The FP virus is very stable and resistant to many disinfectants. It may remain infectious at room temperature for as long as one year.

Which *Cats are Susceptible to the Virus?*

While cats of any age may be infected, young kittens, sick cats and indoor cats that have not been vaccinated are most susceptible. Young cats are much more likely than adults to become ill when infected with FP virus. Kittens less than 16 weeks of age may die at a rate of about 75%, whereas adult cats may show no signs of disease at all. In the past, FP was a leading cause of death in cats. Today, FP is an uncommon disease due in large part to the use of highly effective vaccines.

Urban areas are most likely to see outbreaks of FP during the warmer months. The virus has appeared in all parts of the United States and most countries of the world.

Kennels, pet shops, humane shelters, and other areas where groups of cats are quartered appear to be the main reservoirs of FP today.



How is *FP Treated?*

The prognosis for infected kittens less than eight weeks old is poor. Older cats have a greater chance of survival if adequate treatment is provided early in the course of the disease. Treatment is limited to supportive therapy to help the patient gain and retain sufficient strength to combat the virus with its own immune system. There are no medications capable of killing the virus; strict isolation is essential.

The veterinarian will attempt to combat dehydration, provide nutrients, and prevent secondary infection with antibiotics. If the cat survives for 48 hours, its chances for recovery are much better. The area where the cat is kept should be warm, free of drafts, and very clean. Plenty of "tender loving care" is very important. Cats may lose the will to live, so frequent petting, hand feeding, and good nursing care by the owner are essential.

Other cats that may have been in close association with the infected animal should be carefully examined.



What *about Prevention & Protection?*

FP is controlled in several ways. Cats that survive a natural infection develop sufficient active immunity to protect them for the rest of their lives. Mild cases may go unnoticed and also produce immunity.

It is also possible for kittens to receive immunity through the transfer of antibody via the colostrum, the first milk produced by the mother. This passive immunity is temporary; its duration of effect varies in proportion to the level of antibody in the mother's body. Rarely is it effective in kittens older than 12 weeks.

Vaccines offer the safest protection. Most vaccines are made from live viruses treated to destroy their ability to cause disease. They stimulate the cat's body to produce protective antibodies to prevent infection by natural disease-causing viruses. The vaccines are effective but are preventive, not curative. They must be administered before the cat is exposed and infected. Most young kittens receive their first vaccination between six and eight weeks of age and with follow-up vaccines given until the kitten is more than 12 weeks of age. Specific vaccination schedules vary dependent on many factors, such as the disease incidence in the area, age and health of cat. The pet owner should consult a veterinarian for advice on the correct schedule for each cat.

And Now A Note On Your Pet's General Good Health

A healthy pet is a happy companion. Your pet's daily well-being requires regular care and close attention to any hint of ill health. The American Veterinary Medical Association suggests that you consult your veterinarian if your pet shows any of the following signs:

- Abnormal discharges from the nose, eyes or other body openings.
- Abnormal behavior such as sudden viciousness or excessive sleepiness.
- Abnormal lumps, limping or difficulty getting up or lying down.
- Loss of appetite, marked weight loss or gain or excessive water consumption.
- Difficult, abnormal or uncontrolled waste elimination.
- Excessive head shaking, scratching, and licking or biting any part of the body.
- Dandruff, loss of hair, open sores or a ragged or dull coat.
- Foul breath or excessive tartar deposits on teeth.



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What you should know about

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