



Tony La Russa's
**Animal
Rescue
Foundation**

The Facts about FeLV

What is Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)?

FeLV is a contagious disease that was unknown prior to 1973. It is considered one of the major causes of deaths in cats. It is a viral disease that suppresses the immune system. It causes anemia, leukemia and tumors. Cats infected with FeLV are more susceptible to many other infections. A blood test can be performed to determine whether a cat has been infected with the virus. Even though the cat may test positive, it does not necessarily mean the cat has the disease. A veterinarian can discuss variables involved with testing.



How are cats infected?

The FeLV virus exists in saliva, urine and feces; therefore it is easily transmitted from cat to cat by casual contact. Casual contact includes the sharing of food and water bowls, grooming practices and litter boxes. It can be passed to unborn kittens during pregnancy or through a nursing mother's milk. The virus is short-lived outside the body. It can only exist in the environment for a few hours. Cleaning with ordinary household disinfectants can eliminate it. Not all cats exposed to the virus will develop the disease. Cats most at risk are young kittens whose

immune systems have not matured. Geriatric, sick or cats under stress are more at risk because their immune systems are depressed. Of cats contracting the disease, one-third will die of the disease within the first year. If a cat is healthy but tests positive for the disease, it is possible the cat could live a nearly normal life if confined indoors.

What can you do to protect your cat from FeLV?

Once a cat has tested negative for FeLV, the best prevention is to keep the cat inside at all times. Before bringing a new cat into a home, make sure it has tested negative for FeLV and has not been at risk for exposure since the test was completed. If the cat has indoor/outdoor privileges, make sure it is vaccinated for FeLV. Be aware that the vaccine for FeLV is not 100 percent effective in preventing the infection of the virus and the outdoor cat could still be at risk. A veterinarian may recommend a yearly testing for the virus for indoor/outdoor cats.