

## Protecting your cat against feline leukemia virus (FeLV)



For the first time in history, cats now outnumber dogs as pets in and around American homes. Over 65 million cats look to their human families

for protection against hunger and disease.

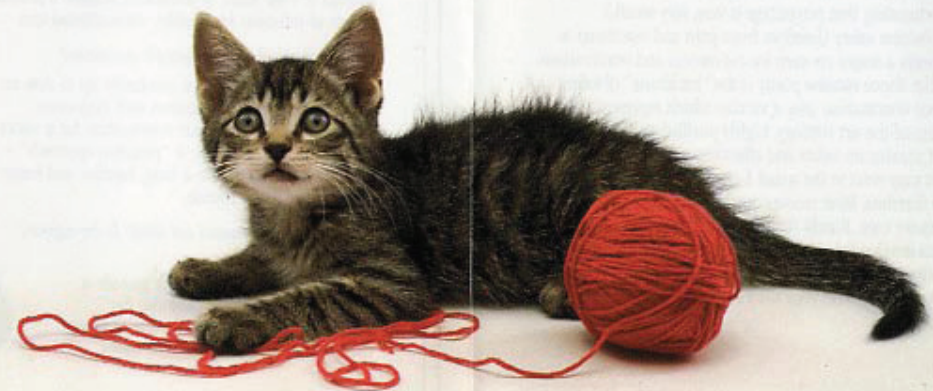
A huge responsibility for pet owners! But they are richly rewarded by equally large measures of satisfaction when proper care is extended.

Cat health took a giant step forward some 35 years ago, when scientists in Scotland identified a specific virus responsible for leukemia-like cancers. The organism was also found to weaken the cat's immune system, leaving the door open for a wide range of other diseases.

### A cancer-causing virus

Technically, the "discovery" is a C-type retrovirus that is oncogenic, or cancer-causing.

Science has since learned a great deal about the infectious disease complex called feline leukemia virus, or FeLV. All cats are susceptible to the virus.



It is found worldwide. It is the leading infectious killer of cats. And while there is no current cure for the disease, it can be accurately diagnosed.

But the best news is that there *are* ways to protect your cat(s) against this vicious killer.

### How it spreads

Your protection program should start with an understanding of how this serious infection is transmitted from cat to cat.

FeLV is a "close contact" disease. The infected cat can shed large quantities of virus in its saliva or other body fluids. Disease organisms are passed to susceptible healthy cats through shared food or water containers, friendly nuzzling or licking, mating or fighting.

The infection can also be transmitted to baby kittens even before they are born, or later on through mother's milk.

It is only logical that risk of your cat becoming infected increases with everyday cat-to-cat contacts: multi-cat households, neighborhood "visiting", shows and vacation travel.

We know that up to 30% of the cats exposed to

Notes:

This booklet produced and distributed by  
Synbiotics Corporation and your veterinarian  
in the interest of better health for your cat.

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the FeLV virus will become chronically infected, will develop obvious disease, and quite possibly will die of FeLV related disease.

Others will become infected but never appear to be ill.

**Important:** some of these well-appearing cats may become virus carriers and spread the disease to healthy cats. Still other infected cats will develop strong immunity and recover.

Until your veterinarian conducts diagnostic tests and a thorough examination, you will be unable to tell which category best describes your cat's status. Even then, cats in early stages of incubating the infection may not be detected as positives.

Early vaccination, followed by an annual booster, is the only safe answer.

## The FeLV vaccination program Safe and effective

Starting with kittens at 9-10 weeks of age, two vaccinations 2 to 3 weeks apart (plus an annual booster) provides dependable protection.

(It is important to remember that no vaccine protects 100% of an animal...or human...population. Some cats, for reasons not well understood, will not respond to vaccination and remain susceptible to the infection. Fortunately, that percentage is very, very small.)

Vaccine safety (freedom from pain and reactions) is always a major concern for cat owners and veterinarians alike. Since vaccine purity is the "backbone" of safety, your veterinarian uses a vaccine which represents state-of-the-art virology, highly purified and concentrated for maximum safety and effectiveness. Occasionally a cat may react to the small 1-ml dose with mild vomiting or diarrhea. Most recover quickly, although some may require care. Rarely (between 1 in 1,000 and 1 in 10,000) cats develop injection-associated sarcomas (tumors) following vaccination. It is recommended that those risks be discussed with your veterinarian.

## Questions and Answers

Q. *Is an annual booster recommended?*

A. Yes.

Q. *Should infected cats be vaccinated?*

A. Usually there is no value in vaccinating an infected cat; the vaccine does not enhance or cure the disease. (Remember, however, that there are several different diseases in the cat population which produce similar illnesses.)

Q. *Is FeLV a disease?*

A. Good question! Actually, it's more like a group of diseases. Leukemia (a blood cancer) and tumors are only two of the ultimate possibilities. The disease complex also weakens the cat's immune system to attacks from bacteria, viruses and other secondary invaders. This opens the door to a host of problems ranging from pneumonia to infertility, lethargy, anemia, skin sores and inappetence.

Q. *So there is no treatment or cure for FeLV?*

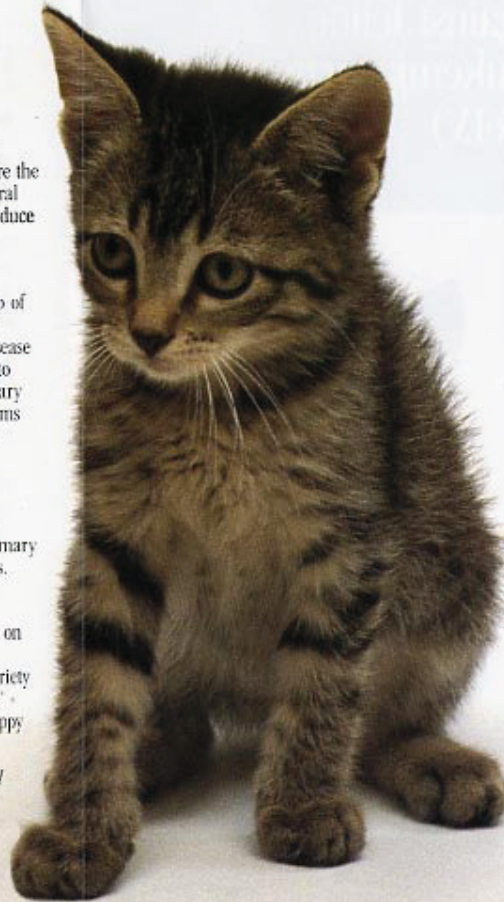
A. That's true. Some cats survive the disease for months or even years, to sometimes become a primary source of infection for healthy, unvaccinated cats.

Q. *Where can I go with specific questions?*

A. Your veterinarian keeps constantly up to date on FeLV. Diagnostics, preventatives and treatments are available through your veterinarian for a variety of pet diseases. Generally, a "program approach" is the best way to assure a long, healthy and happy life for your feline friends.

Q. *Is my unvaccinated cat likely to be exposed to FeLV?*

A. Only your veterinarian can provide a reliable answer to that question. For starters, however, we invite you to complete the Symbiotics FeLV Risk Factor Index.



## Feline leukemia: Is your cat at risk?

Prepared by Dr. Dennis Macy,  
Comparative Oncology Unit, Colorado State University

Answer each question by circling the right answer. Then total the scores you have circled to obtain your cat's FeLV Risk Factor Index.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Your cat's name \_\_\_\_\_

### Habits

1. Is your cat a totally indoor cat? (0), outdoor cat? (20), or both? (10)
2. Does your cat live in a multi-cat household or come in contact with other cats?  
A. No, does not come in contact with any other cat. (0)  
B. Yes, comes in contact with one additional cat. (10)  
C. Yes, comes in contact with two cats. (30)  
D. Yes, comes in contact with three or more cats. (40)

SUBTOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_

### History

3. How did you obtain your cat?  
A. From parents certified FeLV virus free. (0)  
B. Purchased certified FeLV-free from commercial breeder or pet shop. (0)  
C. Purchased non-certified FeLV-free from breeder or pet shop. (20)  
D. Adopted from unknown background. (20)  
E. My cat adopted me. (20)

SUBTOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_

### Health Status

4. How would you describe your cat? (Choose as many as may apply.)  
A. Healthy (0) B. Fearful (20)  
C. Has gastrointestinal problems (vomiting, diarrhea) (20)  
D. Lethargic (30) E. Has poor appetite (40) F. Is losing weight (50)
5. Your cat's age is?  
A. Less than one year (10) B. 1-3 years (30)  
C. 4-6 years (50) D. 7-10 years (20) E. 11 years or older (20)
6. Has your cat been subjected to other health-related stress factors?  
A. None (0) B. Recent injury (10) C. Chronic disease (50)  
D. Multiple cat fight abscesses (50)  
E. Exposure to another FeLV-positive cat (60)
7. When was your cat last tested for FeLV?  
A. Within the last year (0) B. More than a year ago (10) C. Don't know (20)
8. What was the result of your cat's last FeLV test?  
A. Negative (0) B. Positive (50) C. Don't know (20)

SUBTOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL SCORE (FeLV Risk Factor Index): \_\_\_\_\_

What your score means: Use the summary below to find the Feline Leukemia Risk Factor for your pet.

**10 to 70 Points** - If the risk factor for your cat is 70 or less, your cat is at a low risk of being infected with FeLV. Congratulations! You are a fortunate pet owner. Your veterinarian can show you how to continue protecting your pet, which may include testing for FeLV and vaccinating if negative.

**80 to 180 Points** - If your cat's score falls between 80 and 180, your cat has a moderate level of risk for exposure. Your cat should be tested for FeLV and if negative, is eligible for vaccination.

**190 to 330 Points** - If the score is 190 or above, your cat is in a high-risk group. It should be tested as soon as possible and if negative, is eligible for vaccination.