

Feline Calici Virus

"Feline calici virus is extremely contagious infection. It is generally accepted practice to vaccinate cats against the disease. Symptoms include upper respiratory problems including oral lesions and runny nose. Treatment involves making sure your cat is eating, drinking and antibiotics to avoid infection."



Feline calicivirus (FCV) is an upper respiratory virus that produces flu-like symptoms in cats. It's usually not too serious. It's spread through direct contact with saliva, eye or nose discharge, or sometimes the feces of infected cats. Some cats carry the virus for years without having any symptoms at all. The virus can also live for several days outside of a cat's body, in bedding, dishes, and litter trays. It's resistant to many disinfectants, so it may still be present after a good cleaning. (Using a 1:32 solution of household bleach should do the trick).

Cats should be vaccinated against feline calici virus as kittens and receive annual booster shots to protect them. Humans cannot catch this infection from cats. A cat can spread the disease to other cats via the air and from the nose up to 30 days after recovery. The infection can live on dry surfaces for up to 30 days.

About Calicivirus

- A common virus affecting cats (other caliciviruses infect other species)
- The "C" in "FVRCP" combination (three-in-one) vaccines stands for calicivirus.
- There are several different strains of calicivirus
- Caliciviruses are most often associated with upper respiratory infections ("colds") in cats
- Calicivirus infections may occur in combination with other viruses or bacteria to produce more severe upper respiratory infections
- Illness due to calicivirus varies in severity
- Some feline calicivirus strains cause limping due to foot sores or joint inflammation (arthritis)



Symptoms

Symptoms of feline calici virus include:

- Lack of appetite
- Sores in the mouth, on the lips or tongue, or on the tip of the nose
- Difficulty breathing (your cat may develop pneumonia)
- Runny eyes and nose
- Stiff, sore joints or muscles (may resemble arthritis)
- Fever
- Some strains of feline calici virus also cause sores on the feet
- Inflammation around the mouth (stomatitis)

Remember, it is possible for a cat to be infected with feline calici virus and have no symptoms at all.

Diagnosis

A feline calici virus diagnosis is usually made based on a cat's symptoms and medical history (has the cat been vaccinated against the virus and could she have been recently exposed?). A chest x-ray may also be done to check for pneumonia.

This virus shares symptoms with other feline viruses such as rhinotracheitis (differentiated from calicivirus by more sneezing, eye inflammation and discharge) and chlamydiosis where in addition to some of the aforementioned symptoms your cat would also be suffering from conjunctivitis (red eyes).

Treatment

In most cases, supportive care is all that's needed to treat feline calici virus. For more severe cases you will have to watch out for dehydration and if your cat is eating. If your cat has a mouth ulcer, fever or if it loses her sense of smell than eating can be a problem.

To get your cat to eat you might want to try making the food easier to eat by blending it. Try foods that have a stronger smell such as fish based food or try warming the cat food to bring out the smell. Your veterinarian will have to feed your cat with a feeding tube if she doesn't eat for a period of 3 days.

Keep your cat inside where she is warm and dry. If she has sores in her mouth, provide her with soft food to eat. Make sure she has plenty of fresh water available at all times.

If your cat has a lot of eye and nasal discharge, you can clean it away with a warm, wet washcloth or a cloth soaked with saline solution. If your cat's airways are dry then nebulisation with saline may be recommended. If your cat seems very "stuffed up," you may want to run a humidifier, or you can try putting her in the bathroom with the hot shower running for a bit. This will help to break up some of the mucous in the airways.

In some cases, secondary infections set in. These are treated as necessary, generally with antibiotics. Your cat may also need pain medication for muscle and joint pain.

There is a very strong version of feline calici virus called VS-FCV infection. If your cat has this form of the virus than more aggressive treatment is needed including fluid therapy to avoid dehydration, antibiotics to avoid infection and steroids. While treatment is thought to be effective, there aren't any studies that we are aware of which prove that this course of therapy works (Hurley 2006).

