

Feline Panleukopenia aka Feline Distemper

Also known as feline distemper, this disease is highly contagious.

Feline panleukopenia, or feline distemper, is a highly contagious viral disease. Confusion surrounds this disease because of its name. It is not, as some think, related to canine distemper, which causes coldlike symptoms followed by seizures. **Feline distemper causes fever, loss of appetite, vomiting, depression, diarrhea, dehydration and other complications that frequently result in death.**



Feline panleukopenia is caused by feline parvovirus. Transmission occurs readily through contact with infected cats or by contact with infectious virus from saliva, urine, feces and other discharges in a contaminated environment. The virus may remain infective in the environment for many months. Most common disinfectants have little effect on it.

In the past, feline panleukopenia killed thousands of cats every year. Because as many as 90 to 100 percent of unvaccinated cats exposed to feline distemper will become ill, and many of them, especially the very young and the very old, will die, this disease used to decimate entire neighborhoods of cats. Vaccination has limited this disease, but it is still a threat to unvaccinated cats and kittens.

Most veterinarians use combination vaccines that protect against feline upper respiratory diseases as well as feline panleukopenia (**FVRCP or FVRPC**). **Vaccination boosters should be given according to vaccine label instructions--usually every two to four weeks--until a kitten is at least 12 weeks old, with a minimum of two boosters given during this period. Thereafter, annual boosters maintain immunity.**

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FROM: "THE CAT'S MEOW"-Dr. Katherine Dodds, D.V.M.

Feline Panleukopenia Virus (FPV) is a Parvovirus that infects primarily young kittens, but cats of any age are susceptible. For years it had been called feline distemper, perhaps because it was deadly like canine distemper and has a few of the same clinical signs. Nonetheless, it is in fact a member of the Parvo family of viruses and acts in a similar manner in cats as well.

FPV is a very contagious virus; sick animals may spread the virus through feces, urine, saliva, and vomits. In the acute stages of the disease, it has been theorized that fleas and other biting insects may also transmit the disease. Animals who recover may also act as carriers and shed the virus in feces and urine for many months. Another serious consideration with FPV is that it can persist in the environment for up to one year and can resist many disinfectants; the good news is that a dilute solution of Clorox will kill the virus.

Cats infected with FPV get sick. Very sick. Common clinical signs include high fevers, depression, anorexia, vomiting, and diarrhea. Morbidity is also very high, meaning most exposed, unvaccinated cats will catch the disease. Mortality (death) can range anywhere from 25-75% depending upon the virulence of the virus. If kittens are infected prenatally (before birth), the virus attacks a portion of the brain called the cerebellum; ataxia, or severe incoordination is the result. The most common laboratory finding is leukopenia, hence the disease name; this means a very low white blood cell count.

If there is any good news about FPV, it is that it can be prevented by vaccines. Vaccinations should begin at around 6-8 weeks of age for kittens; this is the time the maternal antibodies given to a kitten through the mother's milk begin to fade. As these antibodies leave, a kitten is again susceptible to the virus. Therefore, vaccination at this time is critical.



There is no treatment for FPV once the cat comes down with it. Much like that for canine Parvovirus, therapy is supportive and is aimed at correcting dehydration and electrolyte imbalances with intravenous fluids, controlling vomiting and diarrhea, and preventing secondary bacterial infections with antibiotics. FPV is one of a handful of deadly viruses that cause disease and death in cats and kittens.

As always, consult your Veterinarian about starting a program of vaccinations to protect your beloved, furry, feline friends!

