

As the name implies, FIV is closely related to HIV in humans. FIV is a retrovirus, as are feline leukemia virus (FeLV) and HIV/AIDS (in humans). Retroviruses are slow-acting, insidious viruses that cause illness gradually, giving its host ample opportunity to infect others. Death of the host is often the result, but the process can take years.

Much like FeLV, FIV negatively impacts the cat by chronically suppressing the immune system, which may lead to moderate-to-severe stomatitis (mouth infection), diarrhea, fever, ocular disease, and secondary bacterial infections. FIV may also cause cancer, as do other retroviruses. It seems like a cruel trick that cats may recover from the symptoms of chronic infection only to succumb to cancer years later. FIV is considered a disease of “fighting cats,” as it is most commonly spread through bite wounds.

As with the other viral diseases we treat at Plano Animal Clinic, our treatment is geared toward stopping the virus from replicating and preventing the spread of the virus from cell to cell in the infected animal. Immune stimulating nutrients are then used to help the body overcome the residual infection, increasing the odds of patient recovery. The treatment is comparatively safe with a low chance of adverse reaction, although it is certainly possible for the patient's condition to worsen even with treatment. Affected cats usually show marked clinical improvement in their physical symptoms, with enhanced appetite, attitude, and activity. We have even had three sick seropositive (tests positive) cats convert to seronegative status. The experts say this is not possible, but we have the test results to prove it.

What is the long-term prognosis for the health of a cat that makes marked clinical improvement with treatment or even converts to seronegative status? We do not really know. We know that retroviruses damage cellular DNA, which may produce cancer cells later in life. Therefore, the future of these cats is uncertain. Do their bodies really clear the virus when they test negative or is it still lurking in some dark corner? Again, we do not know. Only through the treatment of many FIV positive cats will the answers begin to reveal themselves. If you have an FIV positive cat, we may be able to help or, at least, we are willing to try.