

All About Pets

The national pet care information service



FELINE INFECTIOUS PERITONITIS (FIP)



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

Feline Infectious Peritonitis is a disease caused by a virus that is sadly always fatal. However, careful treatments may make your cat's remaining time more comfortable. It does not affect other animals or humans.





What is FIP?

The disease is caused by a virus, which is often found in healthy cats and usually causes no major health problems. However, in some cats it causes serious disease. The disease has two different forms. The more common form is called 'wet FIP' because in this disease the blood vessels leak, fluid oozes out of the blood and the cat's belly swells. Leakage of fluid may also occur in the chest, stopping the cat from breathing properly. The less common form of the disease is 'dry FIP' in which there is no build up of fluid but thick scar tissue develops on the cat's internal organs. Except in rare cases, wet FIP is fatal within about five weeks of diagnosis. The dry form is equally deadly but affected cats may survive for a few months.

Will my cat catch FIP?

Some pedigree breeds such as Burmese appear to be affected more often than ordinary domestic 'moggies'. Only about one in a hundred cats is likely to go down with the disease but the risk is much higher where several cats live together, such as in a breeding cattery or rescue centre. Overcrowding and other stressful factors can increase the risk of disease.

How does my vet know my cat has FIP?

In its early stages, FIP causes a variety of symptoms which can easily be mistaken for other diseases – weight loss, lethargy, diarrhoea, poor appetite and fever. Sometimes the nervous system may be damaged causing clumsiness or loss of balance, or there may be discolouration of the eyes. Although blood tests have improved considerably over the last few years and it is now possible for a vet to be 90 per cent sure of the diagnosis, there is no completely reliable blood test to show that your cat has FIP. The only sure method of diagnosis is to take a tissue sample from one of the internal organs. In some cases it may be possible to perform a surgical biopsy to obtain this, but often it can only be done at post-mortem.

What can be done to treat my cat?

There is no treatment that will cure the disease. However, it is possible to attempt treatment with steroids and other drugs, which may help to improve your cat's condition for a while – in a few cases, for some months.



How can I stop my other cats catching the disease?

The virus is spread mainly in faeces, though it can sometimes be present in saliva (spit). Some cats contract the virus but are able to fight off the disease and these can continue to carry the virus and infect other cats. A cat with suspected FIP should be kept indoors in a separate room so as to avoid direct contact with all other cats. It should have its own feeding bowl and litter tray and these must be cleaned every few days.

The virus usually only survives a few days outside the animal, though it can last weeks if dried. It can be killed using a 1:32 dilute solution of household bleach. Disinfect feeding bowls and litter trays for at least 20 minutes. Vacuum rooms thoroughly and wipe down room surfaces with dilute bleach. It is important to make sure that other cats in the household avoid stress – things like going to a cattery or having workmen in – and are maintained in good health by worming, flea treatment and so on. Ensure optimum nutrition by feeding a wide variety of quality foods and consult your vet about the use of antioxidants.



Can my cat be vaccinated against FIP?

An FIP vaccine has been developed in the USA but vets disagree on how effective it is in preventing symptoms of FIP. This vaccine is not yet available in the UK. Vaccinating healthy cats against other important diseases, such as Feline Leukaemia Virus, keeps their defences strong and may reduce the risk of them getting FIP.

Further information

For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit www.allaboutpets.org.uk, the national pet care information service. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is provided by The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity. We rely entirely on your support to enable us to continue our vital work. Any contribution would be most welcome. Thank you.

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