



FIV: NOT A DEATH SENTENCE

ABCD: “Never put a cat to sleep just because it is FIV positive!”

Ghent, 31 March – The European Advisory Board on Cat Diseases (ABCD) has published the first European prevention and management guidelines for feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV).

FIV infection has a long latent or ‘asymptomatic’ phase that can last for month or years, or may even be lifelong. During this phase, the infected cat remains relatively free of clinical signs (which may include chronic gingivostomatitis, chronic rhinitis, lymphadenopathy, immune-mediated glomerulonephritis and weight loss). Many clinical signs may not be caused directly by FIV itself, but rather may arise as a consequence of the increased susceptibility to secondary infections.

FIV positive? Not necessarily a death sentence

Positive in-practice test results obtained in a low prevalence population (e.g. young, indoor-only or breeding cats) should always be confirmed by a laboratory.

“Cats should never be euthanased just because of an FIV positive test result, stresses Margaret Hosie (University of Glasgow), ABCD member and internationally recognised FIV expert. “FIV-infected cats may have a good life expectancy if they receive prompt treatment for secondary infections.”

FIV tests in kittens should be interpreted with caution, since young kittens from FIV-infected queens may test seropositive as a result of maternal antibodies. Such kittens should be retested at approximately 16 weeks of age. In rare cases, maternal antibodies may persist for up to six months and kittens testing seropositive at 16 weeks should be retested two months later.

Management: monitor and treat promptly

“FIV-infected cats should receive veterinary health checks at least every six months so that treatment can be instigated promptly if clinical signs arise”, Dr Hosie adds. Checks should include monitoring of their weight and routine laboratory testing such as haematology and biochemistry.

The potential risks and benefits of routine vaccination of FIV-infected cats should be assessed for each individual case. For example, the risk of infection is very low for elderly indoor cats that have been vaccinated previously; hence it may be advisable to avoid booster vaccination. In contrast, vaccination is strongly advised for FIV-infected cats with a high risk of exposure to other pathogens (e.g. free-roaming cats).

Prevalence: up to 44% in sick cats

Endemic worldwide, FIV was first isolated in 1986. There are five distinct subtypes, with subtypes A and B being found most commonly in Europe. Its prevalence is highly variable between regions, with estimates of 1 to 14% in healthy cats and up to 44% in sick cats. Infection is transmitted mainly via saliva by biting. The virus survives only minutes outside the host and is susceptible to all disinfectants including common soap.

For further details and downloads of the full-text ABCD Feline Immunodeficiency Guidelines, please visit www.abcd-vets.org. There you will also find recommendations for specific situations, such as breeding catteries and cats undergoing corticosteroid treatment.

The guidelines on FIV were adopted at the sixth meeting of the ABCD, held in Munich (Germany) on 24-26 October 2007. At the meeting, the panel also discussed rabies in cats, for which guidelines are currently in preparation.

Notes to editors

- The European Advisory Board on Cat Diseases is an independent panel of 17 leading veterinarians from ten European countries, with an expertise in immunology, vaccinology and/or feline medicine. The ABCD was set up to compile guidelines for the prevention and management of major feline infectious diseases in Europe, based on current scientific knowledge.
- Please visit www.abcd-vets.org for detailed background information.
- Interviews, pictures (speakers, diseased cats...) and the ABCD logo are available upon request.
- Animal healthcare company Merial helped set up the European ABCD and supports this initiative through funding. Merial is a world-leading, innovation-driven company, providing a comprehensive range of products to enhance the health, well-being and performance of a wide range of animals. For more information, please see www.merial.com.

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