

FELINE HERPES VIRUS

What is Feline Herpes Virus (FHV)?

Feline herpes virus most commonly infects kittens and causes sneezing, ocular and nasal discharge, and a reluctance to eat and play. With good nursing care, the vast majority of kittens return to normal within 3 weeks. Vaccinated kittens may still develop disease, but the illness is less severe. Approximately 80% of FHV infected cats become latent carriers with a 45% chance of a viral re-activation. Adult cats with eye disease due to FHV are more likely to be suffering from viral re-activation than from a primary FHV infection.

What happens when the virus is re-activated?

The feline herpes virus can hide quietly in your cat's nerve roots. During periods of stress, the virus can travel down the nerves and injure the conjunctiva and cornea in one or both eyes. Affected cats begin squinting, tearing, and may paw at the eye(s). Some cats may also sneeze, stop eating and feel poorly.

What stressful events may precipitate viral re-activation?

Three common stressful events that cause FHV re-activation are:

- 1) introduction of a new cat or dog into the household
- 2) your cat is moved to a new household
- 3) you go away on vacation

Basically, anything that alters the normal daily routine of your cat may permit viral re-activation.

How should FHV be treated?

The severity of the disease and the eye structures involved will determine the treatment. Acyclovir is an oral antiviral that may be used to control FHV. Topical antivirals include Viroptic, Idoxuridine, and Betadine eye drops. Sometimes surgery is required to repair the damage done by the virus.

Will the virus come back?

Topical and systemic antiviral medications can control FHV, but they cannot completely eliminate the virus from your cat's body. There is no effective prevention of future attacks. Early treatment arrests the disease before it becomes severe.