



# Feline Infectious Peritonitis

## What Is FIP?

Feline infectious peritonitis (FIP) is a viral disease of cats caused by certain strains of a virus called the feline coronavirus. In a small percent of infected cats (5 to 10 percent), the infection progresses into clinical FIP. The virus is then referred to as feline infectious peritonitis virus (FIPV). Once a cat develops clinical FIP involving one or many systems of the cat's body, the disease is progressive and is almost always fatal.

## Is my cat at risk for developing FIP?

Cats with weak immune systems are most likely to develop the disease, including kittens, cats already infected with feline leukemia virus (FeLV), and geriatric cats. Most cats that develop FIP are under two years of age, but cats of any age may develop the disease. FIP is relatively uncommon in the general cat population. However, the disease rate is much higher in multiple-cat populations, such as some shelters and catteries.

## What are the symptoms of FIP?

Only a small percentage of cats that are exposed to the feline coronavirus develop FIP - and this can occur weeks, months, or even years after initial exposure.

In cats that develop FIP, the symptoms can appear to be sudden since cats have an amazing ability to mask disease until they are in a crisis state. Once symptoms develop, often there is increasing severity over the course of several weeks, ending in death. Generally, these cats first develop nonspecific symptoms such as loss of appetite, weight loss, depression, rough hair coat, and fever.

There are two major forms of FIP, an effusive, or "wet" form, and a noneffusive, or "dry" form. Generally, cats will exhibit the signs of the noneffusive form FIP more slowly than the effusive form. Symptoms generally include chronic weight loss, depression, anemia, and a persistent fever that does not respond to antibiotic therapy.

The effusive form of FIP is characterized by an accumulation of fluid in the abdomen, or less commonly in the chest. Early in the disease, the cat may exhibit similar symptoms to the dry form, including weight loss, fever, loss of appetite, and lethargy. The wet form of the disease often progresses rapidly, and the cat may quickly appear pot-bellied due to fluid accumulation in the abdomen. When the fluid accumulation becomes excessive, it may become difficult for the cat to breathe normally.

FIP can be difficult to diagnose because each cat can display different symptoms that are similar to those of many other diseases.

## Can my cat be tested for FIP?

One of the most difficult aspects of FIP is that there is no simple diagnostic test. A positive result means only that the cat has had a prior exposure to coronavirus, but not necessarily one that causes FIP.

To date, there is no way to screen healthy cats for the risk of developing FIP. Generally, veterinarians may rely on a presumptive diagnosis, which can be made with a relatively high

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degree of confidence by evaluation of the cat's history, presenting symptoms, examination of fluid if it is present, and the results of supporting laboratory tests including a positive coronavirus antibody titer.

### **Can FIP be treated?**

Unfortunately, there is no known cure or effective treatment for FIP at this time. Some treatments may induce short-term remissions in a small percentage of cats; however, FIP is a fatal disease. Treatment is generally aimed at supportive care, such as good nursing care and nutrition, and alleviating the inflammatory response of the disease.

### **Can I protect my cat from getting FIP?**

In multiple cat environments, keeping cats as healthy as possible and minimizing exposure to infectious agents decreases the likelihood of cats developing FIP. Litter boxes should be kept clean and located away from food and water dishes. Litter should be cleansed of feces daily, and the box should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected regularly. Newly acquired cats and any cats that are suspected of being infected should be separated from other cats. Preventing overcrowding, keeping cats current on vaccinations, and providing proper nutrition can also help decrease the occurrence of FIP in groups of cats.

There is only one licensed FIP vaccine available; however, this vaccine has minimal if any effectiveness in preventing FIP, and it is not generally recommended. Cat owners should consult their veterinarian to help them decide if their cat should be vaccinated.

*Information taken from a brochure prepared by the American Association of Feline Practitioners and the Cornell Feline Health Center, Cornell University, College of Veterinary Medicine, committed to improving the health of cats by developing methods to prevent or cure feline diseases and by providing continuing education to veterinarians and cat owners.*

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