

Diagnosing FeLV and FIV

The retroviral status of all cats should be known because the serious health consequences of infection influence patient management both in illness and wellness care. Failure to identify infected cats may lead to inadvertent exposure and transmission to uninfected cats. Misdiagnosis of infection in uninfected cats may lead to inappropriate changes in lifestyle or even euthanasia.

Cats should be tested when they are:

- ▶ **Sick, regardless of age, despite previous negative test results or previous vaccination.** These viruses are associated with a wide variety of health disorders.^{5,6} Identification of retroviral infection as a complicating factor can assist in the development of optimal management plans.
- ▶ **About to be adopted, regardless of age, or brought into a new household.** Even if no other cats are present in the household, testing will protect future cats that may join the family as well as neighborhood cats should the pet escape or be allowed outside.
 - ▶ **At risk of exposure even if their most recent test was negative.** As an example, a 2008 study showed that more than 19% of cats with cutaneous abscesses were FeLV or FIV positive at the time of presentation.⁸ Because of delay in seroconversion following initial infection, these cats should also be re-tested (a minimum of 30 days after the last potential FeLV exposure and 60 days after potential FIV exposure).
 - ▶ **Of “unknown” viral status.** Infected cats can remain asymptomatic for years, during which time they may serve as hidden sources of infection to other cats in the household.
 - ▶ **About to be vaccinated against FeLV or FIV.** These vaccines should not be administered to cats that are already infected. Vaccination does not affect the carrier state, the capacity to infect other cats or the development of disease in cats with pre-existing infection.

