

## Feline AIDS

Does your kitty cat roam outside? Have you heard cats fighting during the night? If you answered yes, then your cat is at risk of catching feline AIDS!

Feline AIDS, caused by the *Feline Immunodeficiency Virus* (FIV), works in a similar manner to human AIDS infection. The virus attacks the infected cat's immune system, causing the immune system to lose its ability to fight off opportunistic infections.

Recent studies have shown that nearly 20% of cats within Australian communities are infected with this potentially life threatening disease. We have noted an increased number of FIV positive cats in the Canowindra region lately.

Although FIV is not transmissible to humans, it is extremely contagious to other cats. The virus is transmitted through the saliva of infected cats, most commonly through bite wounds. This puts all free-roaming cats at risk, especially non-desexed male cats.

Once infected the disease is present for life. Cats may not show signs of FIV for years after initial infection. However, when the cat's immune system is challenged they are unable to mount a full response and so commonly succumb to illness. Signs to look out for include weight loss, poor coat condition, anaemia and diarrhoea. Some cats get recurrent infections of the skin, eyes, urinary tract or respiratory system.

There is no cure for FIV. Treatment is aimed at managing and preventing the infections and conditions which the infected cat is challenged with. Infected cats must be kept indoors and should visit their vet for regular health checks.

We do have some good news though! There is a vaccine available for the prevention of FIV. It is best practice to have cats vaccinated at the time of their kitten vaccinations; if this has not been done we must perform a quick blood test to check for the virus. If the cat returns a negative result they require three vaccinations two weeks apart to ensure immunity. Following this your cat will only need yearly boosters, which conveniently can be given alongside the usual yearly vaccinations.

Please contact Cowra Veterinary Centre with any queries or to make an appointment for a FIV test and vaccination for your cat.