Cats Protection’s guidelines for FIV / FeLV testing

The following FIV and FeLV test result flow charts should be used as guidance for the management of cats in Cats Protection’s care and interpretation of test results.

There may be situations not covered or requiring a different procedure, in which case, the Cats Protection representative or vet should contact the Veterinary Department via veterinary@cats.org.uk.

Confirmation of a positive screening test results for Cats Protection cats should be carried out as follows:

**FIV confirmation in apparently healthy cats:**
- Kittens and adults – DNA qPCR test at Langford Veterinary Diagnostics, Bristol, using an EDTA blood sample. Cats Protection submission forms for discounted PCR can be found at www.cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets/vet-products-and-discount-schemes

**FeLV confirmation in apparently healthy cats**
- We would not recommend PCR testing, but prefer that HEPARIN AND EDTA blood samples are sent to Veterinary Diagnostic Services, Glasgow for virus isolation. Submission forms can be found on Glasgow’s Vet Diagnostic Services website. CP does not currently hold a discount for the cost of FeLV confirmation testing.

Although many confirmatory laboratories like to do an ELISA test as well, Cats Protection does not recommend this, as an in-house screening test will have already been performed. Cats Protection can consent to this if the laboratory wishes to perform a repeat screening test free of charge for their own comparative purposes, but the charity does not see a need to pay for it.
Cats Protection’s guidelines for FIV / FeLV testing

1. FIV Screening Test Positive
   Adult cats older than six months

   Welfare concerns or true feral

   Euthanasia
   (NB. Ensure to adhere to Stray policy)

   Confirm with PCR at Langford Diagnostic Services

   PCR Negative
   Rehome as FIV negative

   PCR Positive
   Suited to indoor life
     Rehome as FIV positive
   Not suited to indoor life
     Euthanasia
     (NB. Ensure to adhere to Stray policy)

Key
FIV = Feline Immunodeficiency Virus
PCR = polymerase chain reaction test
Langford Diagnostic Services = specific, specialist external laboratory
This flow chart is for guidance only
Cats Protection’s guidelines for FIV / FeLV testing

2. FIV Screening
Test Negative
Adult cats older than six months

Healthy cat

Sick and still suspicious of FIV

Rehome as FIV negative
OR
Release as per TNR guidelines (feral)

Domestic

Feral

Confirm with PCR at Langford Diagnostic Services

Euthanasia
(NB. Ensure to adhere to Stray policy)

PCR Negative

PCR Positive

Look for and treat other causes of illness

Euthanasia
(NB. Ensure to adhere to Stray policy)

Key
FIV = Feline Immunodeficiency Virus
PCR = polymerase chain reaction test
Langford Diagnostic Services = specific, specialist external laboratory

This flow chart is for guidance only
Cats Protection’s guidelines for FIV / FeLV testing

3. FIV Screening Test Positive
Kittens aged eight weeks old – six months old

If healthy, rehome as FIV negative, advising that the kitten was (suspected if not known) born to an FIV positive mother. Antibodies against this virus were found on a screening test, but a test for DNA in the bloodstream was negative. These antibodies were likely passed over in the milk from the mother.

Give Handout 1

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Key
FIV = Feline Immunodeficiency Virus
PCR = polymerase chain reaction test
Langford Diagnostic Services = specific, specialist external laboratory

This flow chart is for guidance only
Cats Protection’s guidelines for FIV / FeLV testing

4. FIV Screening
Test Negative
Kittens aged eight weeks old – six months old

If mother and any other in-contacts were FIV negative or unknown

Home as FIV negative
OR
Release as per TNR guidelines (feral)

If mother or in-contact was FIV positive

Home as FIV negative (domestic kitten) but advise that mother or in-contact was positive (if known) and recommend speak to vet

Give Handout 2
OR
Release as per TNR guidelines (feral kitten)

Key
FIV = Feline Immunodeficiency Virus
TNR = trap, neuter, return

This flow chart is for guidance only
Cats Protection’s guidelines for FIV / FeLV testing

5. FeLV Screening Test Positive
   Adult or kitten

Healthy and domestic

Sick and domestic, or feral

Euthanasia
(NB. Ensure to adhere to Stray policy)

Isolate, and confirm with VI at Glasgow Veterinary Diagnostic Services

A cat of any age whose exposure history is unknown OR any cat that is younger than six months old - euthanasia
(NB. Ensure to adhere to Stray policy)

Older than six months old AND if certain the 1st exposure to FeLV was only very recent

Keep in isolation, retest using VI after 1 month

VI Positive

VI Negative

Home as FeLV negative

VI Positive

VI Negative

Home as FeLV negative but explain had been in contact with an FeLV positive cat

Euthanasia
(NB. Ensure to adhere to Stray policy)

Key
FeLV = Feline Leukaemia Virus
VI = virus isolation test
Glasgow Veterinary Diagnostic Services = specific, specialist external laboratory

This flow chart is for guidance only
Cats Protection’s guidelines for FIV / FeLV testing

6. FeLV Screening
Test Negative
Adult or kitten

Healthy

Unhealthy and still suspicious

If feral, or not known to have had recent contact with FeLV positive cat

If not feral and known to have had recent contact with an FeLV positive cat

Euthanasia (NB. Ensure to adhere to Stray policy)

Home as FeLV negative (domestic cat) or release as per TNR guidelines (feral cat)

Keep in isolation

VI at Glasgow Veterinary Diagnostic Services

VI Negative

VI Positive

Wait one month after exposure to FeLV

VI at Glasgow Veterinary Diagnostic Services

VI Negative

Look for and treat other cause of illness

Euthanasia (NB. Ensure to adhere to Stray policy)

VI Positive

Euthanasia (NB. Ensure to adhere to Stray policy)

VI Negative

Home as negative but explain had been in contact with an FeLV positive cat

Key
FeLV = Feline Leukaemia Virus
VI = virus isolation test
TNR = trap, neuter, return
Glasgow Veterinary Diagnostic Services = specific, specialist external laboratory

This flow chart is for guidance only
FIV / FeLV confirmatory blood tests

When to confirm screen test FIV/FeLV results

Unless the cat is showing characteristic signs of FeLV or FIV, or is a feral cat over 8 weeks old, all positive screening test results for FIV/FeLV should be confirmed at a reliable external laboratory. We currently recommend using University of Glasgow Veterinary Diagnostic Services for FeLV in all cats (VI test) and Bristol laboratory for FIV in all cats (PCR test).

If a screening test is negative but the vet is suspicious of the result, confirmation should be sought as described above.

Recommended FIV/FeLV confirmatory blood tests at external laboratories

- Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test – the PCR test looks for genetic material and is especially useful in kittens born of FIV positive queens
- Virus isolation (VI) – A VI test grows the FeLV virus, to identify whether it is present

Details of confirmatory laboratories

Submission forms and further details can be found on the following websites:

University of Glasgow  http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/vet/cad
University of Bristol  A discounted test for CP cats can be submitted on the form found at https://www.cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets/vet-products-and-discount-schemes

FIV testing

Adult cats

Screening test kits detect FIV antibodies which develop four to six weeks after infection. For adult cats which test positive for FIV on a screening test, the guidance is to then send the blood (EDTA sample) to the University of Bristol's Langford Veterinary Diagnostics for confirmation by PCR.

IFA (immunofluorescence assay) is not recommended for Cats Protection's cats. If it has been undertaken in Cats Protection's cats and has yielded inconclusive results, then a PCR test at Bristol's Langford Veterinary Diagnostics is recommended.

Kittens

Kittens born to an FIV-positive mother can have maternal FIV antibodies until they are five to six months old, meaning if they were tested younger than six months of age using a screening test, it is likely that they would show positive results. Because the PCR test looks for actual genetic material, it is very useful in the diagnosis of infection in young kittens which may have maternally-derived antibodies, but which do not actually have FIV. For kittens that test positive on a screening test, a blood sample (EDTA) should be sent to the University of Bristol Laboratory for confirmation with a PCR test.
FeLV testing

Unlike tests for FIV, FeLV tests are not affected by maternally-derived antibodies, so they can be used for cats of any age.

Screening test kits detect free FeLV antigen found in the cat’s plasma. If a healthy cat or kitten tests positive for FeLV on a screening test, the guidance is to then send the blood to the University of Glasgow Laboratory for confirmation by VI. Please send blood in both EDTA and heparin tubes.

A PCR test for FeLV is available at some laboratories. PCR results must be interpreted with care because the PCR test detects FeLV genetic material and this may still be present in cats which have been transiently (briefly) infected with FeLV and then go on to recover, and so it can be difficult to interpret positive FeLV PCR results.

More information on FIV/FeLV, including blood testing recommendations can be found on The Cat Group’s website: www.thecatgroup.org.uk
Handout One

For owners taking on a kitten initially testing FIV antibody positive and subsequently testing FIV DNA negative on a confirmatory test.

Testing for FIV in kittens can be complicated. Veterinary practice screening test kits detect antibodies to FIV, so a positive result means that antibodies to FIV have been detected. In adult cats this positive antibody result means that the cat is infected with the FIV virus. However, in kittens this may only mean that they have some of their infected mother’s antibodies from the milk, but not the virus itself. In fact, only around one third of kittens born of FIV positive mothers are FIV positive themselves. Therefore a Cats Protection kitten testing positive (for antibodies) on a screening test kit has a special (PCR) test done at a reliable external laboratory to identify whether there is any actual virus present or not.

This kitten tested positive on a screening test, but negative on the PCR test. This indicates that the kitten did have antibodies, likely from its (FIV positive) mother passed over in the milk, but is considered to be FIV negative itself.

Should you or your vet require further information on FIV diagnostic testing, please see the Cats Protection Veterinary Guide section on ‘FIV and FeLV testing of cats in CP care’, or alternatively please contact the Cats Protection Veterinary Department via veterinary@cats.org.uk.
Handout Two

For owners taking on a kitten from an FIV positive mother when the kitten has tested FIV antibody negative

This kitten’s mother was FIV positive. Fortunately only one third of kittens born to FIV positive queens are FIV positive themselves. This kitten has tested negative on a veterinary practice screening test.

Should you or your vet require further information on FIV diagnostic testing, please see the Cats Protection Veterinary Guide section on ‘FIV and FeLV testing of cats in CP care’, or alternatively please contact the Cats Protection Veterinary Department via veterinary@cats.org.uk.