

## Infection Alert

**Your cat's cold can be deadly without timely treatment. Learn the facts about herpes virus and calicivirus.**

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Protect your cat from herpes by keeping her vaccinated. Keep your pet away from other cats showing signs of respiratory illness. For herpes-infected cats, Powell said that L-lysine, an amino acid available at most health food stores, can help prevent recurrence of the virus. Luckily herpes is unstable within the environment; cleaning with most disinfectants will kill the virus and prevent it from spreading to other cats.

Calicivirus Feline calicivirus (FCV) is another common cause of feline respiratory infections, accounting for between 20 percent and 53 percent of cases. The chance of spreading the virus increases when infected cats sneeze around uninfected cats. Unlike herpes, however, FCV transmission can persist in the environment, which means scrupulous disinfection is essential to prevent further contamination or infection. Cats with FCV shed the virus through secretions from the eyes, nose and mouth. Blood, urine and feces also can contain the virus.

After a cat becomes exposed to FCV, the acute respiratory illness can develop within two to 10 days. A distinguishing feature is that, instead of causing the corneal ulcers characteristic of the herpes virus, calicivirus is associated with inflamed mouth and gums.

Occasionally, affected kittens develop "limping kitten syndrome." Other manifestations of calicivirus include skin ulcers, fever, conjunctivitis (red eyes), runny nose and pneumonia. Ulcers of the tongue occur in some cats.

While vaccines for FCV can reduce the severity of the illness, they do not fully prevent infection or persistent shedding of the virus. FCV undergoes rapid mutation, leading to the development of many different strains over time, so vaccines must be updated to incorporate the new strains.

One of the most disturbing points about FCV is that recently, veterinarians have isolated several highly infectious new strains of the virus from cats that have caused outbreaks of hemorrhagic-like fever across the United States. Up to 50 percent of cats have died in these outbreaks, with older, vaccinated cats being the most susceptible victims. Signs include high fever (greater than 105 degrees Fahrenheit), lack of appetite, hair loss, facial ulcers and superficial swelling on the head and limbs. Eventually, severe bleeding and clotting problems can develop.