

## When Can I Get My Kitten Tested for FIV, FeLV?

**CatChannel veterinary expert Arnold Plotnick, DVM, advises when kitten can be tested, and whether it should be separated from older cats.**

*By Arnold Plotnick, DVM*

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**Q:** I found an orphaned kitten, which the vet has judged to be between 4-5 weeks old. I have four full-grown cats who are not up to date on their shots, although they completed all their first-year shots. They range in age from 4-5 years old, and are strictly indoor cats. I keep the baby in a carrier away from the other cats. I wash my hands after touching it. Although no actual contact has been made, I see my grown cats sniffing the air around the carrier. The vet said I can not get the baby tested for FIV and leukemia for another several weeks. What is the risk of having this baby around my other cats? Please advise; the vet said it should be OK, but then I read articles and it scares me to death. Thank you so much for taking the time to read this.

**A:** Your vet is incorrect about having to wait before testing for feline leukemia (FeLV) testing. There is no age requirement for this test; it can be done at any time. The test does require a few drops of blood, and it is not easy to get blood from a 4- or 5-week-old kitten. (Maybe this is why he said you have to wait a few weeks). A positive test means the kitten is likely infected with FeLV. This would need to be confirmed with a second test. A negative test means, in all likelihood, that the kitten is not infected with FeLV.

The FIV test is a bit trickier to interpret. The FIV test detects antibodies against the FIV virus. Kittens get their antibodies from their mother. A positive FIV test suggests the mother is infected; the kitten may or may not be, and will need to be tested again at 6 months of age. A negative FIV test should be confirmed, but for all intents and purposes, a negative FIV test in a kitten strongly suggests that the cat is not infected with the virus.

FeLV is spread to cats through direct contact, such as licking, grooming, fighting and sharing food bowls, water bowls and litterboxes. FIV is tougher to transmit, and is spread mostly through fighting. By keeping this kitten separated from your other cats and washing your hands after handling it, you are making it extremely unlikely that this kitten would spread either of these viruses to your older cats. Merely sniffing around the carrier is not enough to transmit these viruses, especially FIV. Have your kitten tested as soon as your vet feels the cat is of a size large enough to get a blood sample. If the kitten tests negative, you can relax.