

## Why Does My Kitten Have a Runny Nose?

**CatChannel veterinary expert Arnold Plotnick, DVM, discusses upper respiratory infections and other cat ailments.**

*By Arnold Plotnick, DVM*

Posted: June 12, 2009, 3 a.m. EDT

**Q:** We purchased an Abyssinian kitten approximately eight weeks ago. We knew he was the runt of the litter at the time, but he had a sweet personality. Unfortunately, Mario had a runny nose and watery eye. The breeder told us that antibiotic eye drops should take care of it. However, it did not. Mario has been on two separate antibiotics and he still has the runny nose and these terrible sneezing fits in which a large, green string of mucus is left on the floor.

We have had a test completed on the mucus and my vet called with a diagnosis of either cat AIDS or E coli. Please be advised my husband did not keep the sample refrigerated prior to the test as suggested by the vet. When the paperwork came in the mail from the vet it only mentioned E coli as a diagnosis. I am very concerned, as I have two small children that love to play with the kitten and at times they get scratched or bit.

Can I be sure these diseases are not contagious to my children and what is in store for Mario? Do you have any suggestions as to what type of treatment Mario should receive, as he still has the runny nose and watery eye? Mario will be 6 months old and weighs 4.4 pounds. We have an appointment to get him neutered next week. Any help would be greatly appreciated!

**A:** It is not unusual for a purebred kitten that comes from a breeding colony to have an upper respiratory infection. (It would almost be unusual if he didn't!) Most of these infections are viral in nature, with the herpes virus being the most likely culprit. These viral infections often cause a watery discharge from the eyes and/or nose. If a secondary bacterial infection develops, the watery discharge can become thick and mucoid.

I suspect that your cat has a viral upper respiratory infection with a secondary bacterial infection. Antibiotics usually help control the bacterial infection, and the cat's immune system usually defeats the viral infection on its own. Some cats, however, have trouble defeating the viral infection and may require medication for this. Lysine is an amino acid that helps treat herpes virus infections, and is available as a veterinary preparation. Famciclovir is a relatively new antiviral drug that has shown excellent efficacy at treating herpes viral infections. Your vet should consider prescribing these medications to help little Mario.

The second part of your letter is confusing to me. You say in your letter that your kitten may have FIV ("cat AIDS") based on a test on the mucus. This has to be incorrect. FIV is diagnosed based on a blood test. Perhaps your vet mentioned FIV as a possibility in cases where a cat is having trouble defeating what should be a simple upper respiratory infection. In any event, all cats should be tested for the feline leukemia virus and the FIV virus before going to their new home. If you haven't had that done, you should do that promptly. Again, this is a blood test. Your vet may have cultured the mucus in an attempt to see exactly what is causing the nasal discharge; however, culture of the nasal discharge is rarely helpful because the feline nasal cavity has a wide array of bacteria that are normal flora. E coli is a common organism, and it is very unlikely that this poses any danger to you or your children.

Have your kitten tested for feline leukemia and FIV, and then ask your vet to prescribe lysine and Famciclovir, as well as an antibiotic. To me, this seems the best course of treatment.