

Feline Pancreatitis Test Could Lead to Earlier Diagnosis

Recent surveys showed many cats have signs of the disease.

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Feline pancreatitis is more common than previously thought, so a test to help vets detect the disease early could improve treatments for cats. Idexx Reference Laboratories of Westbrook, Maine, now is able to test for pancreatic lipase levels in feline blood, a potential indicator of pancreatitis.

The company will test blood samples at its Maine facility and provide overnight results to referring veterinarians.

The new test was developed in conjunction with the GI (gastrointestinal) Laboratory at Texas A&M University's School of Veterinary Medicine and is based on the Texas A&M Lab's pancreatic lipase immunoreactivity test, which had been the most sensitive test available for pancreatitis.

Diagnosis of pancreatitis in cats is complicated because symptoms of the disease are not particularly specific, with the main clinical signs being lethargy (found in 100 percent of diagnosed cats), anorexia (97 percent), dehydration (92 percent), hypothermia (68 percent), vomiting (35 percent) and abdominal pain (25 percent), according to the Merck Veterinary Manual.

These general symptoms also could indicate several other feline diseases and conditions, meaning pancreatitis might not be diagnosed until after another disease was treated. This is significant because early identification of severe cases, as well as the ability to manage the disease early and prevent complications, could affect the success of the treatment.

Cats and dogs appear to have a similar mortality rate for severe cases of pancreatitis to humans, which is about 50 percent, according to the Merck manual.

The standalone test will allow veterinarians to identify or rule out pancreatitis at an earlier stage in the disease.

Idexx reports that feline pancreatitis is more common than previously thought, citing a 2007 study published in the Journal of Veterinary Pathology. That study, which looked at necropsy reports of cats for laboratory signs of pancreatitis, found that 67 percent of cats that had necropsies showed histological evidence of pancreatitis, regardless of cause of death, and that 45 percent of seemingly healthy cats that died showed signs of pancreatitis.