

Cat Illness Found Higher at Certain Shelters

Morris Animal Foundation study finds increased likelihood of feline URI in stressful shelter conditions.

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Stressful shelter conditions increase the likelihood of feline upper respiratory infection (URI), according to new research funded by Morris Animal Foundation's Happy Healthy Cat Campaign. This infection, which is similar to the common cold in humans, is cited among the top reasons for euthanasia of cats in shelters.

The research is being led by Kate Hurley, DVM, director of the Koret Shelter Medicine Program at the University of California, Davis. Specifically, Hurley is assessing disease incidence, cage layout and sanitation methods to determine how shelter housing affects stress and stress-related illnesses.

Her research shows that prevalence of feline URI varies across the country, with anywhere from 5 percent to 60 percent of shelter cats getting sick. Environmental risk factors explain some of the variation, and so far, shelters with the lowest URI rates seem to be those with high-quality housing for cats, according to the Morris Animal Foundation.

"Our hope is that we will find something that not only helps cats stay healthy but also helps them get out of shelters alive," Hurley said.

This project is one of three Helping Shelters Help Cats studies funded through the foundation's Happy Healthy Cat Campaign, which celebrated its first anniversary on Nov. 17. In another study, an international team from the United States, Canada and Australia is working to develop effective behavioral interventions to minimize the spread of URI. A third study, at The Ohio State University, will create a training program for shelter personnel. The program seeks to increase safety and comfort in the shelter.

The Morris Animal Foundation points out that although the studies focus on shelters, the findings are relevant to all pets that spend time in veterinary clinics, catteries or kennels.

In related news, an anonymous donor will match every dollar (up to \$500,000) donated to Helping Shelter Cats. Based on this pledge, the foundation recently sent out a new request for proposals for shelter-based research projects that will investigate feline infectious peritonitis, also known as FIP.