

Feline Leukemia Survey Reveals Disconnect

More education is needed about the disease and preventing it, according to survey.

Posted: February 1, 2010, 3 a.m. EST

FeLV is a highly contagious viral infection transmitted from cat to cat through saliva and urine, among other factors. A new survey indicates a need for veterinarians to educate pet owners about feline leukemia (FeLV). The nationwide online survey of 1,005 pet owners, including 805 who identified themselves as cat owners, revealed that there is a disconnect between understanding the severity of the disease and preventive options. The survey was conducted by WMS Marketing Services for Merial Ltd.

For instance, 82 percent of respondents understand that FeLV is a “high risk” disease threat to cats, but considerably less were informed regarding preventive measures and how the disease spreads.

Although vaccination is the best preventive, according to Merial, only 61 percent of cat owners vaccinate against FeLV. The American Association of Feline Practitioners highly recommends vaccination against FeLV for all kittens/cats at risk of exposure, namely those not housed strictly indoors. About 30 percent of cat owners don't believe an effective vaccine exists, according to the survey.

“The survey identified cat owner understanding about this deadly disease and has provided an opportunity to spread the word about vaccination,” said Bob Menardi, DVM, veterinary spokesperson for the Duluth, Ga.-based company. “It's important for cat owners to understand that feline leukemia is a disease to prevent, not treat, and that vaccination is the best line of defense against the disease.”

FeLV is a highly contagious viral infection transmitted from cat to cat through saliva and urine, among other factors. FeLV causes cancer in about 20 percent of infected cats and contributes to other infectious diseases, such as anemia, by suppressing the immune system. Once a cat begins to manifest clinical signs of the disease, death is likely, according to the company.

The survey also revealed that about 51 percent of cat owners incorrectly believe infected cats can be successfully treated. In addition, 52 percent of the respondents don't believe the disease is spread by social grooming, even though in reality, it is a primary way to contract FeLV.

The top three reasons cat owners have their pet vaccinated against FeLV, according to the survey, are: cat owners know it is prevalent and a risk (33 percent); vaccination is part of their routine wellness program (32 percent); and their veterinarian recommends it (23 percent). Merial suggests that all cat owners should consult with their veterinarian about the need for vaccination.