

Cat Illnesses Linked to Oral Diseases

Study says felines with oral disease are more vulnerable to FIV and FeLV.

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A recent study of about 9,000 cats by veterinarians across the United States found that cats with an oral disease may be nearly five times as likely to test positive for Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) or Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV), two of the deadliest diseases affecting cats.

In the study, 14 percent of cats that have some type of oral disease also tested positive for FIV, FeLV or both. The American Veterinary Dental Society reports that 80 percent of dogs and 70 percent of cats show signs of oral disease by age three.

The study's findings indicate that regular dental exams are a critical part of an overall wellness plan for pets. James Richards, director of Cornell University's Feline Health Center, says that even before taking into consideration the link between oral disease and FIV or FeLV, dental problems left untreated can have an impact on cats' ability to eat and groom themselves.

Richards acknowledges that brushing a cat's teeth is much easier said than done, but offers the following tips: Start when your cat is young and teachable. It's much more difficult to teach an adult cat to accept tooth brushing. Get your cat comfortable with you touching its mouth by gently placing your finger in its mouth or on its teeth. Try putting your cat's favorite foods on the toothbrush and letting them get used to it before attempting to brush.

For additional tips on brushing your cat's teeth, check the Cornell Feline Health Center online instructional video.