

Feline Coronavirus (FCoV) and Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP)



CATS PROTECTION
VETERINARY GUIDES



FCoV is a common and contagious virus, passed in the faeces of cats. It is more commonly found in multi-cat households and does not affect other animals or people.

How does a cat catch FCoV?

FCoV is caught by inadvertently swallowing the virus through contact with other cats, litter trays or soil where other cats have toileted. Cats can also re-infect themselves while grooming or eating following toileting. Up to 40 per cent of all cats will be infected with the virus at some time in their lives and most owners will be unaware of it.

What problems does FCoV cause?

Most cats do not display any sign of being infected with FCoV, although some cats get diarrhoea for a few days. These cats tend to shed the virus in their faeces for a few months and remain healthy.

In a very small percentage of cats, the virus mutates and causes a fatal disease called FIP. This is more likely to occur in multi-cat environments and can take weeks or months after the initial infection with FCoV to develop.

If a cat clears FCoV and doesn't develop FIP, is it then immune?

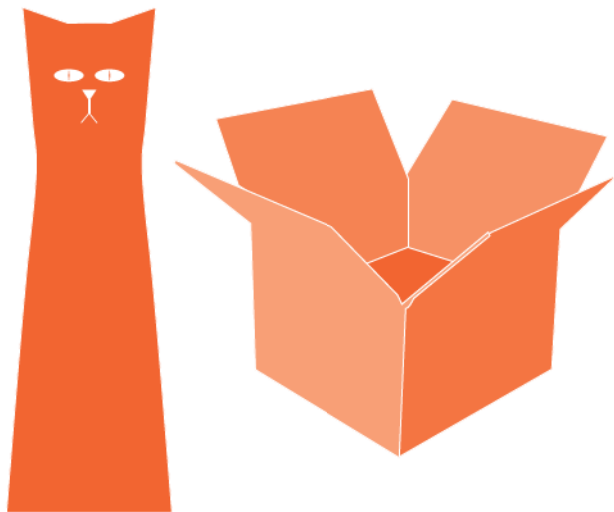
Unfortunately not, a cat can become re-infected with the FCoV which can then mutate into FIP.

Why does FCoV change in some cats?

It is not known exactly why the virus changes to cause FIP in some cats, but a number of factors seem to increase its likelihood:

- stress – eg moving home, new pets in the house, too many pets in the house, being placed in a boarding cattery
- age – young and old cats are more susceptible
- a poor immune system or concurrent disease
- possible genetic factors

There is no test available to predict whether a cat with FCoV will develop FIP.



What are the signs of FIP?

There are no unique signs of FIP and they do vary. Two types of disease exist, although there can be a crossover between the two:

- wet FIP – fluid builds up in the abdomen (causing it to appear swollen) and/or chest (causing breathing difficulties)
- dry FIP – minimal fluid builds up, but the cat may appear dull, **have a poor appetite and/or a high temperature. He may lose weight, have problems with his vision, behaviour or nervous system or develop jaundice**

How is FIP diagnosed?

There is no definitive test available. A combination of history, physical findings, blood tests, X-rays and testing the fluid from the chest or abdomen can give an indication but often, only post-mortem results can confirm FIP.

A blood test can detect antibodies to FCoV, but this can be misleading as a high level of antibodies only means that the cat has been exposed to the virus at some point. It does not indicate that the cat will go on to develop FIP and, in some cases, cats that develop FIP actually have no antibodies at all.

Is there any treatment for FIP?

There is no cure for FIP. Treatment may be given to relieve the symptoms but sadly, most affected cats have to be euthanased.

Can FIP be prevented?

Unfortunately, there is no vaccine in the UK to protect against FCoV or FIP.

Only one cat in ten infected with FCoV will go on to develop FIP. However, should you suspect that your cat has been exposed to FCoV, minimising stress may help to reduce the risk of FIP developing. To do this, avoid overcrowding, introducing a new pet or putting your cat into a cattery. Also try to avoid lots of stressful events happening together eg worming, vaccination and neutering.

It may also help to remove faeces as soon as possible after they are passed and to keep your cat's food bowls away from his litter tray and to disinfect the litter tray at least twice a week.



How long does the virus survive in the environment?

Outside, the virus can usually only survive for hours or, at most, days. Indoors, in dried-up cat litter, it can survive for up to seven weeks. It is killed by most disinfectants.

One of my cats has been diagnosed with FIP, should I isolate him from my other cats?

No, it is highly likely that the other cats will already have been infected with FCoV, but they are no more at risk of developing FIP than any other cat infected with FCoV. Follow the advice on the previous page about preventing FIP.



My cat died of FIP, when can I get another cat?

If it was your only cat, it is probably safe to get another cat two weeks after your cat died. Ensure you disinfect the litter tray, food and water bowls and surrounding areas with diluted bleach before rinsing thoroughly.

If you already have other cats, they are likely to be infected with FCoV and therefore could infect a new cat coming in. Speak to your vet about the best time to get another cat – some vets will recommend waiting until the antibody levels in your current cats have reduced. Also, bear in mind that any new cat may also be infected with FCoV so your vet may suggest testing the new cat for high antibody levels.

Unfortunately, there is no generally agreed practical and effective scheme for achieving control of FIP in multi-cat environments.

This leaflet is one of a range provided by
Cats Protection on issues surrounding cat care.

Cats Protection is the UK's leading feline welfare
charity and helps more than 193,000 cats and kittens
each year. We rely entirely on public generosity to
finance this vital welfare work.

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