



# Love them for life

## 'FLU' IN KITTENS AND CATS

It is estimated that in Australia, 70% of cats will experience cat flu, a contagious upper respiratory infection. It is so contagious that it passes easily and quickly from one cat to another. Cat flu is caused by different pathogens commonly, Feline Herpes Virus (FHV1) or Feline Calici Virus (FCV). Cat flu is triggered from stress and direct contagion. Example stressors include:

- leaving a familiar environment is a key stressor (eg when rehomed);
- another underlying illness causing stress, leading to a downward spiral;
- poor nutrition causing stress and leading to a downward spiral;
- exposure to another cat or kitten with cat flu (eg in the same room).

The symptoms of flu can be subtle or overt depending on how advanced the illness is. Many times the carer realises it is flu when explicit sneezing, weight loss or lethargy is obvious, but when these obvious symptoms are evident, flu is sadly well established and treatment should be initiated immediately. The symptoms include:

- Fever/high temperature, looking depressed (also a symptom of corona virus/FIP)
- Not eating (also a symptom of corona virus/FIP)
- Watery eyes (also a symptom of corona virus/FIP)
- One eye closing with discharge, then both
- Sneezing
- Running nose and congestion
- Sneezing blood
- Ulcers in mouth/tongue
- Blisters on feet or face
- Weight loss

**Intervene early to protect your cat's eyes from secondary infection**

If not treated, a secondary infection of the eyes happens as they cat sneezes and wipes the virus into his or her eyes. Within days, if left untreated, ulceration can occur leading to the need for surgical removal of the eye.

**Flu in unvaccinated cats can be life threatening.** This is why cats are vaccinated to lessen the impact of the virus on them. It is also why cats need to maintain vaccination status (every 3 or so years) especially if living with other cats.



The World League for Protection of Animals Inc  
PO Box 211 Gladesville NSW 2111 . 9817 4892 . [www.wlpa.org](http://www.wlpa.org)

## Prognoses

- Cats should not be euthanised due to flu as it is treatable, even if advanced.
- If one kitten has it, all in the litter will be exposed and should be treated.
- Flu shows itself usually 7 to 10 days after exposure.
- Cat flu usually recurs, often each year eg at change of season.
- To stop a repeat episode, your cat's first experience of cat flu needs to be **managed aggressively with the right ANTI VIRAL medicines** and with good home-nursing which together, is the best hope to prevent recurrence.
- Cats can catch flu at any age. The same aggressive approach is needed.
- **The major prognostic problem with cat flu is that gingivitis (an inflammation of the gums treatable by dental extraction) is a sequel to flu/FCV.** Thus, to save a cat's teeth in later life, early and aggressive anti-viral treatment of cat flu is highly recommended. Dental examination should be regularly done.
- Kittens with early, repeated and severe episodes of cat flu should be suspected as having FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus) and should be FIV tested at age 6 months (the most reliable time for an affordable snap FIV blood test performed by your vet). The compromised immune system of a FIV+ cat will likely explain why the flu presented early and is severe.
- FIV+ cats with flu can be vaccinated and can be successfully treated (WLPA had a 21-year old FIV+ cat with flu who was treated successfully for 4 years).

## Treatment

There is a common misconception that antibiotics (eg vibravet or doxacyline) treats cat flu. It doesn't! It treats secondary infections not the flu itself. **Flu is a virus and can only be treated by an anti-viral.** A vet may provide antibiotic with the view to treating secondary eye infections and to help reduce temperature. The main goal is to commence an anti-viral to prevent worsening of flu and to prevent recurrence.

- Separate the flu suffering cat from other cats and see your vet.
- Support with rest by caging. (sneezing will spread the virus in the home).
- Syringe feed proportions that a well kitten or cat would need to eat.
- Bathe eyes with warm salty water, keeping eyes clean.
- Apply antibiotic eye ointment several times a day to cleaned eyes.
- Give oral antibiotic 2ce per day (vibravet) to protect eyes.
- Advanced flu should be treated with Famciclovir antiviral, **for 21 to 61 days twice per day at 90mg per dose** (or as advised by your vet)
- **Taste is bitter. Best administration is to chop to dose and put whole in the mouth, followed by a syringe of water.**
- Lysene is a mild anti-viral (500mg/day)
- Lysene and Famciclovir (Famovir) are Chemist-over-the-counter medicines.

