

Sunday Column – Life after FIV
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PAWS Humane works very closely with the Best Friends Community Cat Project in Columbus, GA. We will often take in CCP cats that we refer to as “friendlies” who are picked up through trapping and, for one reason or another, cannot be returned to field.

Two of these cats, Vera and Hamilton, have been with us just a few weeks. Vera is a tiny, six pound, two year old, Tortoise Shell Calico. She is as sweet as she can be. Hamilton is twice her size, a buff colored domestic shorthair kitty. He is the whole package, disarmingly handsome and a mature Lothario. Unfortunately, both cats tested FIV+ and that is why they couldn't be returned to the area where they were picked up.

According to the Cornell Feline Health Center, Feline Immunodeficiency Virus, or FIV, is similar to HIV. It is a slow acting virus, but once it takes hold a cat may deteriorate progressively or be plagued by recurring illnesses.

FIV is not easily transmitted to other cats. Only 1.5 to 3 percent of healthy cats in the U.S. are infected. A deep bite wound is the primary mode of transmission and that is why the disease is most common among outdoor male cats, especially the unowned, free-roaming variety. FIV cannot be transmitted to humans.

PAWS Humane brings FIV+ cats into our facility for adoption because we believe they deserve a loving home, just like any other cat. If your FIV+ cat is well-cared for, he may enjoy a long and happy life.

Once a cat tests positive for FIV, the key is to limit exposure to secondary infection. These cats should never go outside because of the risk of infecting other cats, but also because you wouldn't want them to be exposed to diseases other cats may be carrying. Remember, an FIV+ cat's immune system is compromised.

A wholesome, nutritious diet and stress free environment is very important. Uncooked foods should be avoided to minimize risk of food borne illness. Semi-annual visits to your veterinarian for a thorough check-up, is a must. Much can be learned through monitoring changes in weight and examination of gums, eyes and lymph nodes.

It is possible for FIV+ cats to live with non-FIV+ cats without transmitting the disease. You may not want to introduce a new cat to your household that is FIV+ however, if you currently have a cat that tests positive you don't necessarily have to remove him or even separate him from the others. If the cats don't fight the main risk is that of transmitting a secondary infection.

Nobody's perfect and it is these little imperfections and the extra care we give to another creature that makes them so special to us. I once read something similar to this in the story of The Little Prince, by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. It's true.

Please don't be deterred by FIV or you might miss out on one of the best experiences of your life.

Bobbi Yeo lives in Opelika, AL. She is the CEO of PAWS Humane in Columbus, GA, an animal shelter and veterinary clinic offering low-cost spay/neuter and other services to the public. Email her at byeo@pawshumane.org with your comments and story ideas.