**Take the Test**

Hello again, it’s Shelby with Antrim Veterinary Hospital. I’m sure you have heard of Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) and Feline Leukemia Virus. These are two very serious viruses that only affect cats; they are not contagious to humans or other pets. Both of these viruses can be deadly. These viruses can be tested for but unfortunately cannot be treated and just because a pet is infected with one or both of these viruses does not mean they will show symptoms initally. The test works by detecting the antibodies that are formed in the pet’s blood after infection. Once a cat is infected with one of these viruses it will remain infected the remainder of its life.

FIV is found in cats worldwide. The virus is spread mainly through saliva. Therefore, to become infected the cat would need direct contact with the saliva of an infected cat. This mostly happens through a bite. Most FIV positive cats are known as fighters so if your cat has recently been in a fight or had a cat bite abscess, testing them would be a great idea. Very rarely kittens can become infected through their mother, although it is more likely to be a “false” positive; picking up antibodies transferred from the queen in the milk. If a kitten tests positive for FIV it should be retested 60 days later. Any kitten over 6 months of age that still tests positive is considered to be infected. The disease itself does not kill the cat but instead reduces the cat’s immune system so the pet is either unable to respond to other infections or the response is suppressed. If your cat is FIV positive it is recommended to keep it indoors to reduce the risk of picking up infections and to reduce the spread of the virus to other cats.

Feline Leukemia is one of the deadliest viruses in cats. Just like FIV, Feline Leukemia does not kill the cat but instead weakens the immune system to make them more susceptible to other viruses and diseases. However, the Leukemia virus can replicate the genetic code of body cells and either kill the cell or change the cell to make it cancerous. Hence, it is called Leukemia. An infected cat may develop life threatening anemia due to the virus killing off blood cells. Eighty to ninety percent of infected cats will die within 3-4 years. This virus is transmitted through saliva, urine, and feces and is mostly likely transmitted through sharing of litterboxes, food bowl, or mating and mutual grooming. Just like with FIV a cat can also get the virus through its infected mother but all the kittens will likely be born with the virus. The Feline Leukemia vaccination helps to protect our feline friends from this virus. It is highly recommended for the first year of life for all kittens, even if strictly indoors, due to their immature immune system and greatest chance to get the virus. The vaccine is also recommended for all cats that go outdoors or have a lifestyle that may expose them to this deadly virus.

Cats should be tested if they have never been tested before, whenever they are brought into a new household or adopted regardless of age, prior to being vaccinated, whenever they are ill, or if they have a possibility of recently being exposed. If your cat is positive there is supportive care that we can offer them so they can hopefully live a longer life. Schedule a Feline FIV/Leukemia test today. 410-751-0091