

Sierra Animal Wellness Center

Specializing in Holistic, Integrative Veterinary
Medicine



February 8, 2018



Feline Herpes? Here's the Lowdown

Hearing that a cat has herpes has caused more than one client to recoil, but the first thing I try to do is reassure people it can NOT be spread to humans or dogs and it is not the herpes associated with the disease in humans. Feline herpes sounds scary, but it's a manageable condition, and surprisingly common. With prompt veterinary attention and some simple management techniques, your cats can continue to live happy, healthy lives.

What is Feline Herpes?

Feline herpes, also known as feline viral rhino pneumonitis or FVR (the FVR in the FVRCP vaccine) and FHV-1 (feline herpesvirus type 1), is an infectious disease known to affect only cats, both domestic and wild. The standard "core" vaccines your cat receives as a kitten and the yearly exam can help protect your cat against the virus. If a vaccinated cat does contract the virus, the symptoms will probably be less severe than a non-vaccinated cat. Cats of all sizes, ages and breeds are susceptible to feline herpes. However, cats in crowded or stressful conditions or with weak immune systems often develop more severe symptoms, as can kittens, Persians and other flat-face breeds. Diagnosis can be challenging, and is often based on a combination of symptoms, health history and lab tests.



These kittens with their crusty noses and irritated eyes have classic FVR symptoms.

Signs and Symptoms

The virus is a major cause of upper respiratory infections, as well as conjunctivitis

(swelling of the tissue around the eyes). Symptoms often look like a cold or an eye infection and may include sneezing, discharge from the nose and/or eyes, eye ulcers, congestion, fever, drooling, squinting and lethargy. If you observe any of these symptoms in your kitty it is important to get immediate veterinary care, especially since cats weakened by the virus may also develop secondary infections.

How is Feline Herpes Spread?



The most common way is through contact with discharge from an infected cat's eyes, mouth or nose. Contact can occur by sharing litter boxes, food and water dishes or mutual grooming. An infected pregnant cat may also pass the virus on to kittens who are still in the womb. Because the virus is highly contagious, it is common in catteries, shelters and multi-cat households. Be sure and let your vet know if your cat has come in contact with any stray cats, was recently adopted or spent time with cats who were

potentially infected with feline herpes.

Some cats who become infected with feline herpes are latent carriers. Even though they will never display symptoms, they can still pass the virus on to other cats. Stress can cause these carriers to "shed" the virus, exhibiting mild symptoms, which clear up on their own after a few days.

Treatment

Once infected, the majority of cats do not get rid of the virus, but symptoms can be treated. Antibiotic or antiviral medications may be necessary for cats with severe infections, others may respond to treatment with L-lysine, an amino acid that can help prevent the virus from replicating. Drops or creams may be used for conjunctivitis or other eye irritations. These together with good nutrition and TLC will help most cats make a successful recovery.

How to Help Your Infected Cat Feel Better

Regularly and gently wipe your cat's eyes and nose. Discharge may dry and create a hard, uncomfortable crust. Blocked nasal passages can also cause him to stop eating and/or drinking and some cats may require supportive feeding or fluids to help with dehydration. A humidifier or time in a steamy bathroom can help with congestion. Create a calm restful space for your kitty and keep all litter boxes, food and water bowls clean.

Reduce Flare-Ups

The herpes virus reactivates with stress, so a low or no stress environment is helpful in reducing flare-ups. Any sudden change in daily routine or environment, such as new visitors, a move or loud noises can be stressful. To help create a calm environment, provide your cat with clean bedding, dishes and litter box, access to natural light and

hiding places.

In closing, if you think your cat may be infected, call us at (530) 346-6611 and we'll get you and your furry friend in as soon as possible.

Until next time, be well.

- Dr. Peggy

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from 9:00 to 6:00

Tuesday from 9:00 to 3:00

Wednesday from 12:00 to 6:00

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