

FELINE INFECTIOUS ANEMIA

What is Feline Infectious Anemia and what does it do to the cat?

Feline Infectious Anemia (FIA) is a blood disease of cats caused by *Hemobartonella felis* (*H. felis*). *H. felis* attaches to the cat's red blood cells. When the immune system detects this abnormality, it destroys the blood cells. This results in the cat having a shortage of red blood cells, which is the same as being anemic.

How does a cat get FIA?

We are not sure of the means of transmission of FIA. There is speculation that it can be passed from one cat to another by insects that can carry blood; fleas, ticks, and mosquitoes have been considered potential vectors (carriers) of the parasite between cats. However, none of these have been proven.

How is FIA diagnosed?

The presence of *H. felis* on a few red blood cells does not mean that the cat has Feline Infectious Anemia. In fact, *H. felis* is commonly found on the red blood cells of normal cats. In almost all cases of FIA, the cat has encountered another disease or another form of stress. This state of debilitation then triggers *H. felis* and allows the development of FIA.

Diagnosis of this disease is made from a blood sample. If the cat is anemic and large numbers of *H. felis* are present, the diagnosis of FIA is made. Unfortunately, *H. felis* is not always present on the cat's red blood cells because it appears in the blood stream in cycles. If FIA is suspected, it may be necessary to examine several blood samples before *H. felis* is identified.

Is it true that this disease is associated with the leukemia virus?

Since about 20% of cats with FIA are infected with the Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV), a blood test should be performed to detect this virus. This virus can serve as the stress factor that allows the development of FIA. If the FeLV is found, the short-term prognosis is usually good, but the long-term prognosis will be poor because of the diseases which are caused by the feline leukemia virus.

Is FIA treatable?

Treatment is relatively simple and generally successful. Oral medications that suppress *H. felis* are used for several weeks. If the cat is severely anemic, a blood transfusion may be needed.

Since the drugs only suppress *H. felis* and do not completely rid the cat of it, FIA may occur again. Keeping your cat properly vaccinated, feeding it a high quality food, and treating other illnesses promptly will reduce the chances of another episode of FIA.