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Protocols: Testing - Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) and Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)

FIV and FeLV are incurable viruses that only affect cats. Humans cannot catch or transmit these diseases

Cats who test positive for FIV often live long, healthy lives. Many veterinary spay and neuter clinics do not test feral cats for FeLV or FIV because most feral cats enjoy excellent health and are no more likely to be infected with disease than companion cats. In fact, companion cats and feral cats contract FeLV and FIV at an equally low rate (about 4%).

Alley Cat Allies does not support testing feral cats for FIV and FeLV for multiple reasons:

- The percentage of feral cats infected with either FeLV or FIV is low. Approximately 4% are infected with FeLV and 4% with FIV. This is similar to the infection rate in companion cats;
- Spaying or neutering cats inhibits the spread of the viruses. Since spaying and neutering reduces or eliminates the primary modes of transmission, such as fighting and breeding, infected cats pose little risk to other cats.
- Infected cats are often asymptomatic and can remain healthy with no sign of illness for many years;
- Removing and euthanizing a cat that tests positive will not necessarily prevent spread of the infection within the colony—it's likely that the other colony members have already been exposed to the virus;
- Tests can be unreliable, so cats testing positive should be re-tested at least 28 days after the cat's last possible exposure to the virus;
- And testing can be prohibitively expensive. The cost of testing (and often re-testing because of false positive test results) may hinder the success of a spay and neuter program. If the goal of the program is to spay or neuter as many cats as possible, then the resources allotted for testing feral cats would be put to better use by spaying and neutering more cats. Focusing on the goal of an increased number of spays and neuters decreases the incidence of virus transmission.

Alley Cat Allies does not support the euthanasia of healthy cats who test positive for FeLV and FIV. The [American Association of Feline Practitioners](#) agrees, recommending against routine euthanasia of healthy FeLV- and FIV-positive cats. Alley Cat Allies believes that **euthanasia is only necessary for cats who are suffering from pain or injury that is beyond hope of recovery**. It is Alley Cat Allies' philosophy that only under these circumstances should a cat be euthanized to alleviate extreme suffering.

FIV- or FeLV-positive cats should be monitored closely for signs of deteriorating health. If they become ill, they should be trapped and taken to a vet for medical treatment.

Learn more about [FeLV](#) and [FIV](#).

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[Next Step: Protocols - Early-Age Spay and Neuter](#)



Step-by-Step

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[American Association of Feline Practitioners stance on FIV and FeLV »](#)