



FIP (Feline Infection Peritonitis)

What is feline infectious peritonitis (FIP)?

Peritonitis refers to inflammation of the lining of the abdomen and its organs. FIP is a highly fatal form of peritonitis in cats caused by a virus belonging to the coronavirus family. There are two major forms of the disease: effusive (wet) and non effusive (dry).

Effusive (wet) FIP

This is the most common form and occurs when the immune system is ineffective in eliminating the virus. In fact the immune system worsens the condition by forming antibodies to the virus, which are then deposited in small blood vessels. This "immune-mediated" reaction causes inflammation and fluid loss from the blood vessels. The resulting fluid accumulates in the abdomen and / or chest cavity.

Non effusive (dry) FIP

In this form the immune system is effective in eliminating some, but not all of the virus. The remaining virus is "walled off" by the body. Fluid development does not occur because the blood vessels are not attacked.

Symptoms

The clinical signs can vary depending on the form of the disease present. The two forms can occur together, thus broadening the spectrum of signs seen.

Things to Look For

- ◆ Anorexia, weight loss ◆ Fever ◆ Depression ◆ Swollen Abdomen
- ◆ Jaundice - yellow color
- ◆ Breathing ◆ Kidney, liver disorders
- ◆ Central nervous system disorders
- ◆ Eye Disease

Diagnosis

A thorough physical exam by the veterinarian is the first step. A blood work-up to evaluate internal organ function may be helpful but there are no specific findings that point directly to the virus. Radiographs of the abdomen and / or chest may be helpful to establish the presence of fluid. Evaluation of the fluid, if present, often reveals a typical thick, yellowish consistency. Testing for antibodies to the virus in the blood (FIP test) is not reliable because cats are exposed to other corona viruses which will give false positive results.

Treatment

There is no cure for FIP. Once symptoms of the disease are present, death is inevitable. Depending on the physical condition of the cat, supportive treatment may result in temporary relief of signs. Eventually the disease will progress and treatment will be unsuccessful.

Risk Factors Include:

- ◆ Multiple cat households (the virus is transmitted by sneezing and ingestion)
- ◆ Cats originating from a shelter
- ◆ Cats kept outdoors
- ◆ Stressful conditions: overcrowding
- ◆ Poor sanitation, malnutrition