

Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP)

What is FIP?

FIP is a viral infection that affects cats that have compromised immune systems, are very young, or very elderly. In FIP, the body is infiltrated with a type of tissue called a pyogranuloma, a collection of a type of white blood cell. Pyogranulomas are inflammatory and cause significant swelling of any affected organs. As a result of this swelling, many organs that are affected may end up failing because they cannot function properly.

What causes FIP?

FIP develops as a result of an adverse reaction to the feline enteric coronavirus. The feline enteric coronavirus is shed by infected animals in feces. An infected cat may shed some of the virus in feces, and when another cat comes along to investigate, the virus infects the new cat through the mouth and nose. When the cat is infected, the virus may be destroyed by the immune system or it may mutate, allowing it to take advantage of the host's body and live

undetected. This leads to the host's body becoming infiltrated with the virus, causing pyogranulomas. Some cats infected by feline enteric coronavirus present with non-threatening flu like symptoms, and some develop FIP.

What are some symptoms of FIP?

Common clinical symptoms of FIP are fluctuating fever, loss of appetite, lethargy, and weight loss. In the *Effusive Form* of FIP there can be a collection of a yellowish fluid in the abdominal cavity and the patient may appear to have a "pot belly". In the *Dry Form* (non-effusive form), there is no collection of fluid. FIP may present in a variety of ways with a variety of symptoms, which makes diagnosis difficult.

How do you test for FIP?

Currently, there is no specific test for FIP. Initially, it was thought that the difference between developing FIP and the flu like symptoms was the type of feline enteric coronavirus that the cat contracted. However, we now know that the mutation takes place after the cat is infected and varies depending on the specific animal's immune system. Any animal suspected of having FIP should be quarantined and kept away from other pets.

How do you make a diagnosis without a test?

FIP is a clinical diagnosis. This means that rather than confirming infection with a simple test that is negative or positive, the veterinarian must look at the whole picture and take into account many factors including symptoms, history, and blood tests. The key is that if the veterinarian believes the cat may have FIP, it should be treated accordingly against its clinical symptoms, provided with supportive care, and monitored daily.

What is the treatment for FIP?

Because the virus may mutate differently in each animal, there is no specific treatment that can kill the virus and cure the disease. The best treatment that can be offered is to rule out any other possible diseases and offer supportive therapy, which may include fluids, antiviral drugs, and vitamin and mineral supplements to help the body's immune system fight the virus.

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