

Hurricane Animal Hospital
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FIP (Feline Infectious Peritonitis)

FIP is a contagious and fatal disease of cats only. It is caused by a type of virus known as a coronavirus. The virus stimulates the immune system which leads to either of two forms of the disease. The first form, called the wet-form is due to damage to blood vessels. The vessels leak fluid which accumulate in the chest cavity around the lungs or in the belly. The second form of the disease is called the dry-form. It is characterized by tumor like growths which can occur anywhere leading to a large variety of symptoms.

The virus is shed in all bodily secretions, although the virus is picked up through the mouth and the nose. The virus is very unstable outside the body and can only last a few days.

A cat of any age and of any species can catch the disease. The symptoms include:

- *Fever*
- *Weight loss*
- *Dehydration*
- *Shortness of breath (SOB)*
- *Loss of appetite*
- *Vomiting*
- *Anemia*
- *Fluid in the belly*
- *Lethargy*
- *Diarrhea*
- *White gums*
- *Organ Failure*

The most common symptom is a fever that comes and goes and is not responsive to antibiotics. The disease develops slowly from the time of exposure to the time of symptoms. It may take from days to months to cause illness. Lesions can develop in any organ including the eyes, brain, kidneys, liver, spleen, and reproductive organs.

Diagnosis is made with the help of a thorough history, complete physical, and laboratory testing of fluid and tissue. Unfortunately the test for FIP only tells us that a cat has been exposed to a corona virus but not the specific coronavirus that causes FIP.

Therefore, we do not place our confidence in the test alone. The testing done to confirm the diagnosis is quite complex and the doctor will try and explain the testing as it is done.

Sadly there is currently no cure for FIP, nor has any treatment plan been effective in prolonging life or inducing remission. The occasional rare case will go into remission for some time, only to return later. Less than 10% of cases that are treated aggressively will show any response at all. Treatment would consist of chemotherapy and symptomatic therapy (drainage of fluid, supportive nutrition, blood transfusions, antibiotics, etc.). Studies are being done with AIDS type drugs but as of now they are only experimental.

On a good note, a vaccine does exist. The vaccine is given in a liquid form up the nose (no needle of course). Two doses are given at 3 weeks apart to any cat 16 weeks of age or older. The vaccine needs boosted yearly with one dose per year. It protects against multiple strains of FIP. The vaccine is about 80% effective. I recommend that every outdoor cats and any indoor cat with exposure to any other cats get the vaccine. As a personal note, I vaccinate my pets against all preventable diseases and I feel it is extremely important to vaccinate against deadly diseases in everyone's pets.