

Feline Herpesvirus

Feline Herpesvirus (FHV), also known as Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis, is a viral disease that causes acute upper respiratory infections (URIs) primarily in cats in their first year of life.

Virology

Feline Herpesvirus (FHV) consists of double-stranded DNA and a glycoprotein lipid envelope making it a fragile virus outside of the host and easy to kill with disinfectants. The virus prefers damp environments but even so, can only remain active for 18 hours on a surface without a host and an even shorter period of time as an aerosol.

Clinical Signs

Symptoms occur after an incubation period of 24-48 hours. Symptoms include: sneezing, coughing, nasal and ocular discharge, frothy salivation, laboured breathing, anorexia, and fever. Keratitis (inflammation of the eye's cornea) is another common sign of Feline Herpesvirus.

Epidemiology of Transmission

The virus is readily transmitted between cats through: direct contact with saliva and ocular or nasal secretions, inhalation of sneeze droplets, sharing of food bowls and litter trays, contaminated surfaces such as bedding and grooming aids.

Once infected with FHV, virtually all cats will remain latently infected due to the virus's ability to persist in nerve cells. More than 95% of the cat population has been exposed to the virus and over 80% are carriers. Cats that were once affected will therefore become life-long carriers of the virus even if they do not portray the regular symptoms. However, some cats will intermittently shed the virus again and demonstrate symptoms, especially in times of stress or if they become immunocompromised.

Treatment and Control

Just as there is no cure for Human Herpes, there is similarly no cure for Feline Herpesvirus. Viruses are different to bacteria in many ways, one of which being that bacteria are living and constantly reproducing. Once infected with Feline Herpesvirus, a cat may stop producing symptoms but will remain a carrier. The most proactive preventative measure one can take is to disinfect any and all surfaces that are suspected to have come in contact with the virus. As Feline Herpesvirus is easily inactivated by most commonly approved EPA and Health Canada registered disinfectants using a disinfectant that is not harmful to the user or the animals, is a crucial step in infection prevention.

References

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