



FELINE UPPER RESPIRATORY DISEASE

Feline respiratory infections are among the most common of feline diseases. Cats with upper respiratory infections typically show "flu-like" signs with sneezing, discharge from the eyes and nose, coughing, fever and loss of appetite. Young kittens, and cats that have never been vaccinated, are the most susceptible. While several viruses and bacteria may be involved, current research indicates that up to 90% of feline upper respiratory disease is caused by either feline calicivirus or feline herpesvirus-1, also known as rhinotracheitis virus.

In general, infections with rhinotracheitis virus or calicivirus produce similar disease with clinical signs such as discharge from the eyes and nose, ulcers in the tongue and gums, fever, and a general loss of appetite and activity. Illness usually lasts 5-7 days and most cats make an uneventful recovery. Some cats may, however, go on to develop chronic disease which resembles a severe, untreatable "cold." Young kittens may be so severely affected that they die from infection. In most cases, it is not important to determine which virus is causing the disease because treatment is not directed at the particular virus but rather at supporting the cat until he or she recovers, such as preventing dehydration and emaciation due to loss of appetite.

Up to 80% of cats that recover from feline rhinotracheitis virus or calicivirus infections, although no longer sick, continue to carry the viruses. Shedding of the rhinotracheitis virus may be intermittent and is often associated with stress or use of steroids whereas cats tend to shed calicivirus continuously for months to years.

Feline rhinotracheitis virus and calicivirus infections are most commonly transmitted through close contact between cats. Cats that have had the infection and are carriers of the virus (up to 80% of previously infected cats) can shed the virus to other susceptible cats. Sick cats that are shedding virus in sneezed water droplets and in the discharge from their nose and eyes are also an important source of the viruses for susceptible cats.

DESCRIPTION: Upper respiratory infections (URI) are the most common infectious diseases in shelters and kennels. URI is caused by a variety of viruses, just like the common cold; however in cats it can be more severe than the cold is for you. Cats typically do not show that they are ill until the disease is well entrenched in the cat's system.

TRANSMISSION: URI is mainly an airborne virus, but can be transmitted easily by your hands.

SIGNS: URI causes nasal discharge, ocular discharge, sneezing, coughing, ulcers in the mouth and throat, loss of appetite and fever.

TREATMENT: As this is a virus, there is no treatment for the disease, just supportive care for the symptoms including antibiotics for secondary infections. URI can be controlled with vaccination. (Incubation period: 2-6 days)