



Sumo, a rehabilitated stray, tested negative for FIV.

Feline AIDS In Virden

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The cat version of AIDS is FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus). Like HIV in humans, FIV disables a cat's immune system leaving them vulnerable to chronic infections. It's a constant risk for outdoor cats especially strays and male cats that fight, because the virus is usually contracted through deep bite wounds.

Sumo is one of the lucky ones. He spent at least a year surviving (and scrapping) in the back lanes of Virden before being rescued. Dr. Carla Loewen at Virden Animal Hospital tested Sumo for FIV due to his high risk. She says about 20% of the cats she tests have the virus. Fortunately, Sumo does not.

FIV Testing

The FIV blood test is recommended if you are bringing a cat whose history is unknown into your home. A positive test doesn't mean he has to be euthanized. Some owners choose to keep their FIV cats alive and treat the health issues as they arise. In fact, FIV cats can have a normal life span.

As long as the cats in the home don't fight or bite each other, the risk of transmitting FIV between them is very low. But the infected cat *must* stay indoors to prevent him from spreading the virus.

FIV Prevention

There is an FIV vaccine but it has a few problems – it's expensive, it doesn't protect against all strains of the virus, and the FIV blood test can't tell the difference between an infected cat and a vaccinated cat. So while we wait for science to improve the vaccine, the best way to protect your cat from FIV is to keep him inside or in an enclosed cat run.