



Virulent Systemic Feline-Calicivirus

The VS-Calicivirus is a mutation of the common calicivirus (pronounced: K Lee' See Virus). The common calicivirus was identified in the 1970s, and a vaccine was first produced a few years later. The common calicivirus causes an infection in the nose and mouth resulting in sneezing, nasal discharge, fever, poor appetite, and ulcers (open sores) on the tongue. Cats are sick a few days and usually recover completely, although hospitalization may be needed for some.

The VS-Calicivirus causes a disease that begins like the common calicivirus, but it advances to cause other signs that include swelling under the chin or over joints of the legs. Next, hair loss begins in these areas followed by ulcers (open sores) in the same areas. Many of these cats have fevers over 105° F. In some cats the disease goes internal affecting the liver, blood vessels, and pancreas. Many of these cats become icteric (or jaundiced).

This is a very serious disease that is fatal to about 60% of the affected adults and 15% of the affected kittens.

Please talk to your veterinarian and have your cats vaccinated to protect them from this serious virus.

1. It can be fatal.
2. It's highly contagious

Frequently Asked Questions

Where did this new virus come from?

It is a mutation of the common calicivirus. It was first isolated in 1998.

Why does the mutation occur?

We do not know the answer to that question. However, mutation from a non-pathogenic or mildly pathogenic virus to a highly pathogenic virus has occurred many times in human and veterinary medicine. In the 1980's the common feline calicivirus mutated to a virus that caused Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease. This disease killed millions of rabbits before it was contained.

How common is this disease?

It has been officially reported only a few times since 1998. However, now that veterinarians are becoming informed about it, it is very obvious that it is not a rare disease. We had 3 confirmed cases at Alamo Feline Health Center in the last 6 months of 2006.

My cats are already vaccinated for calicivirus. Why is the new vaccine needed?

The calicivirus vaccines we have been using for 25 years only protect against the common strains. They offer no protection for the new VS-Calicivirus. To get full protection, your cat needs both.

Is it necessary to vaccinate my indoor cats against the killer calicivirus?

No, as long as they NEVER leave your house and you do not allow ANY other cats into your house. However, if you take your cat to your veterinarian's office for annual exams or when they have ANY health issues, the possibility of exposure exists. The safest route is to protect them with the new vaccine.

Is there treatment for cats that get this disease?

To date, there has not been a drug found that will kill the VS-Calicivirus. Affected cats are treated with antibiotics for secondary bacterial infections, fluids, and nutritional support.

If my cat gets this disease, are my other cats in danger?

Yes. They should be strictly isolated from the sick cat, and they should immediately get the new vaccine.

How is the virus spread from one cat to another?

It is easily spread directly from cat-to-cat, but it is also passed on one's hands or clothing. Items touched by multiple people in the household (doorknobs, light switches, keyboards, etc.) are often sites of virus spread.

How do I disinfect my house if my cat gets the disease?

Bedding or other materials that contact the cat should be discarded. Bleach (1 cup per quart of water) will kill the virus. Any surfaces touched by the cat or you should be bleached if possible. Bleaching does not have residual disinfecting power so new contact with an infected cat requires bleaching again.

Will the vaccine protect every cat against the disease?

Unfortunately, no. But this should not be surprising because no vaccine, for humans or animals, will protect 100% of those vaccinated. Virus challenge studies by the vaccine manufacturer showed complete protection of 75% of those challenged and the other 25% had very mild signs that only lasted one day. All of those recovered. All of the controls got the disease.

Can my dog or members of my family get this disease?

No. There is no evidence that the VS-Calicivirus has any effect on any species except cats.