
Letter to editor: feline leukaemia virus

In your review of this disease in Vol 14, No 2,¹ you state that IFA testing does not add more information on the cat's disease status than repeat Elisa testing, quoting our 1981 reference² supporting this statement. At that time, 1981, we believed this to be the case, but no longer consider this to be true.

The IFA test detects Felv group specific antigen in peripheral blood smears. There is an exact correlation between a positive IFA test and the recovery of infectious Felv from plasma and usually from saliva. The enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay test (Elisa) for p27 soluble antigen in serum is useful as a screening test and detects antigenaemia and not viraemia.

It is now generally accepted that antigenaemic (Elisa positive) cats should be tested for neutrophil and platelet p27 by IFA prior to accurate assignment of their Felv status and prognosis. Elisa-positive IFA-negative cats may have transient viraemia or latent infection. However these associations have not been confirmed. Most cats with latent Felv infections are Elisa negative in serum and IFA negative in neutrophils.

If the initial Elisa test is positive, the cat should be retested 4-12 weeks after the first test. The second test can also be by Elisa, but a final decision about the cat's future should not be made unless an IFA test is completed. If the IFA test is positive, the cat should be considered viraemic and treated accordingly. We follow this policy with regard to Felv testing at Massey University.

The Felv status of cats prior to vaccination is not a prerequisite as you state and vaccination of viraemic cats *may* do no harm. Pre-vaccination testing is however recommended, as an Felv positive cat can still be a source of infection for other cats. Furthermore, if the cat is tested positive then negative at a second test it is either naturally immune or has some level of latent Felv infection. Vaccinating a latently infected cat may do no harm either. However there is evidence in other species (mice) that the latent period to disease may be shortened by immunostimulation in viraemic animals.³ In the cat this possibility must remain speculative as pointed out by Rojko,³ but we too cannot agree with the recommendation that viraemic cats be vaccinated.

References

- 1 George, G, 1987: Feline leukaemia virus: a review. *Surveillance* 14(2): 9-10.
- 2 Jones, B R, Lee, E A, 1987: Feline leukaemia virus testing. *NZ Vet. J.* 29: 188-189.
- 3 Rojko, J, 1986: Feline leukemia virus vaccines. *Seminars Vet. Med. and Surg. (Small Animal)* 1(1): 61-67.

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