

Comparison of prevalence of feline leukemia and immunodeficiency viruses in feral cats on the San Francisco peninsula, 2001-2003 and 2005-2007

Edinboro, C.H., Exponent, Inc., Health Sciences, USA; cedinboro@exponent.com

Peninsula Humane Society's spay/neuter clinic provides discounted or free services for feral cats in San Mateo County, a mixed suburban and rural county of 700,000 people south of San Francisco. If cats receiving free services test positive for feline leukemia virus (FeLV) or feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV), they are euthanized. Some colony caretakers objected to this policy, prompting this study to determine the prevalence of FeLV and FIV among feral cats presented to the clinic. Between 2001 and 2003, 28 of 1772 (1.6%) and 85 (4.8%) cats tested positive for FeLV and FIV, respectively. FeLV-positive results among male cats ranged from 0.6% to 3.3%; females had similar results. FIV-positive results ranged from 7.8 to 8.2% for males and 1.7% to 2.6% for females ($P < 0.01$ for each year). These proportions did not decrease during this first 3-year period. Overall, the prevalence of FIV was higher, and for FeLV was lower, compared with other U.S. studies. From 2005 through 2007, 22 of 1846 (1.2%) and 107 (5.8%) cats tested positive for FeLV and FIV, respectively. FeLV-positive results among male cats ranged from 0.7% to 2.5%. For females, FeLV-positive results were significantly fewer in 2006 ($P = 0.01$). FIV-positive results ranged from 9.5 to 13.0% for males and 1.1% to 2.6% for females ($P < 0.01$ for each year). Male cats were more likely to be FIV-positive in the later 3-year period ($P = 0.3$). Feral cats from certain cities in San Mateo County were more likely to be positive for these diseases in both 3-year periods. Efforts at neutering of feral cats, and thus disease reduction, have been focused in communities where FeLV and FIV prevalences are highest. Curiously, FIV prevalence for males has increased in spite of increased spay/neuter opportunities in the area ($P = 0.03$ for trend). This trend has been reported elsewhere, and raises questions regarding the best way to control this disease in free-living, community cats.