Just Kittens Rescue does NOT routinely test every cat/kitten for Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) prior to adoption. Please feel free to read further to become educated on our reasoning behind this decision.

1. No test is perfect.
2. FeLV/FIV tests are less accurate when testing healthy cats
3. There is an exceptionally low prevalence of these diseases (<3% nationwide) which means that the chances for false positives increase when regularly testing healthy cats.
4. Example: If you test 1000 cats for FeLV and 47 cats test positive you will find that 17 of the cats that tested positive do not actually have FeLV. This is over 36% of the results being false positives. Additionally, if the prevalence is even lower than 3% (as it often is) you are even more likely to receive a false positive.
5. This accuracy is also drastically affected by the fact that the tests are being used as screening tools on healthy animals as opposed to the times they are being used due to specific indications in the cat’s history or clinical signs that would point to FeLV/FIV.
6. Interpreting test results is overly complex.
   1. Cats that test negative are only negative from the time they were tested.
      1. It takes a minimum of 30 days from when a cat becomes infected with FeLV to test positive on a SNAP test.
      2. It takes a minimum of 60 days from when a cat becomes infected with FIV to test positive on a SNAP test.
   2. Cats infected shortly before admission into rescue would test negative despite having the disease. Although very uncommon due to the low prevalence of the diseases, this is why cats that need testing should be tested at least 60 days after their last known exposure (something best accomplished with the adopter’s veterinarian).
   3. Negative and positive results are exceedingly difficult to interpret for FeLV due to the complexity of the disease.
      1. Cats can test negative on in-house tests and still be infected; not showing signs of the disease until much later.
      2. Cats can test transiently positive and later test negative.
   4. FIV tests generally give reliable negative results, but positive results can be resultant of a previous vaccine or maternal antibodies.
7. The difference in tests.
   1. There are multiple tests available and being used that can vary significantly in their level of accuracy.
      1. Many cats end up being tested multiple times because of false positives and inaccurate tests.
8. Kittens and FIV
   1. Positive FIV antibody tests in kittens under 6 months of age must be interpreted carefully.
   2. It is uncommon for kittens to become infected from the queen, as a result those who test positive are generally not truly infected and will test negative at 6 months of age or older
   3. False positive results are commonly seen due to the FIV antibodies in the queen’s colostrum
9. Kittens and FeLV
   1. Kittens infected via FeLV-positive queens may not test positive for months after birth.
      1. Kittens born to a FeLV-positive queen can be FeLV-negative
   2. The stage of infection can affect the accuracy of the test, causing different tests to have discordant test results; some cats true status is never known
   3. Some kittens are only transiently viremic and may revert to a negative status.
10. Who should be tested?
    1. FeLV/FIV tests are useful and important diagnostic tools at times. The rescue supports using the tests on cats that have clinical signs consistent with FeLV/FIV.
       1. Testing of cats with bite wounds, dental disease, lethargy, chronic illness, etc. is effective and important.

References

Schumacher, E. (2019, February). *Why are some shelters no longer testing all cats for FeLV and FIV.* Featured Resources. Retrieved from <https://www.uwsheltermedicine.com/library/resources/why-are-some-shelters-no-longer-testing-all-cats-for-felv-and-fiv>

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