

Finding a Home for Your FeLV or FIV Rescue

by Tracey Miller

As we are working harder and harder to educate people on FeLV and FIV, more rescues and shelters are giving these cats a chance to find homes. However, it is still an uphill battle finding enough homes and sanctuaries for them all.....especially FeLV cats. Since I have been collecting a group of fantastic people and resources, and we have been successful in finding safe haven for many of these cats, more and more people are turning to us to help them as well. While I am very pleased to see our numbers growing, I have become increasingly aware that despite my best efforts, some of these cats are falling into the cracks.....simply because I cannot keep track of them all. With that in mind, I felt I needed to come up with a way to help these rescues and individuals help themselves. So, this is my first edition of the self-help suggestion guide for placement of FIV and FeLV cats.

Part 1: getting Started

1) Educate Yourself:

I am continually finding myself correcting misconceptions about both FIV and FeLV cats.....even among experienced rescue people. When I say “educate yourself”, I don’t mean go on the local chat groups or Facebook pages and ask the other people in the groups. Do a little online research with respected sites such as Cornell University, Maddies Fund and my current favorite, Clinician’s Brief. In order to speak with potential adopters, you must know what you are talking about.

2) Prepare in Advance:

The time to find a temporary foster or potential adopter is NOT when you get the bad news that one of your rescues has tested positive.....especially for FeLV. Talk with your volunteers NOW, educate them as well and actively recruit people who have a spare room where a cat testing positive for FeLV can reside while you confirm them as positive and network them a permanent home. Since verifying that a cat is actually positive for FeLV can take up to 3 months or more, this is essential. That’s all it takes, a spare room! Contrary to some of the more ridiculous things I’ve seen posted about precautionary measures, you don’t have to have special clothes to wear only in the “isolation room”. You don’t have to constantly wash and sterilize everything in sight either, the FeLV virus cannot survive out of the body for very long; basically, once it’s dry, it’s dead. Nor do you have to go into automatic freakout if your rescue manages to slip out the door on you and enters the domain where negative cats reside. There’s virtually no chance of transmission with that limited amount of contact.....which brings me to my third point.

3) Understand the Controversy:

I am going to drive many people here in to spasms of outrage, but I am an advocate for mixed households. Yes, that’s right..... I am guilty of having confirmed FeLV cats living, eating, drinking and sharing litterboxes with my negative cats. Now, before you get out your lynching ropes and string me up, I’ll let you in on another little secret.....I am not the only one!!! I could introduce you to MANY other people who have mixed households and have had mixed households with ZERO transmission of the virus from the positive cats to the negative cats. Now, because many of these people just don’t talk about it (because they’re afraid of being lynched by well-meaning but misguided cat lovers).....this is not widely known in the cat world, but it works because we follow a few basic rules. I would not do this with rescues or fosters

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because there are usually too many cats (and especially, kittens) in and out, but for cats in a more permanent situation, this is why it works.

Simple guidelines to follow in a mixed household are IF YOUR NEGATIVE CATS ARE:

- Older than 18 months (so that their immune system is fully developed). Kittens should NEVER be allowed around FeLV positive cats for that very reason.
- Spayed and neutered (so that mating practices and behaviors are not happening).
- Properly vaccinated against FeLV (initial vaccination, followed by a booster no later than 3 weeks later)
- In relatively good health

Then the chances of transmission are reduced dramatically. Is there still a CHANCE? Yes, there is still a chance, but then vaccinating can cause an injection site sarcoma..... so do you not vaccinate your cats? Of course you do. Your pet could possibly die during the spay/neuter surgeryso do you not get your cat fixed? Of course you get them fixed. Reports on the effectiveness of the vaccine vary, but when combined with the other conditions I listed above, I would bet the world's supply of catnip that it will be okay. Even vets are coming around to the concept of mixed households (see the list of resources at the end).

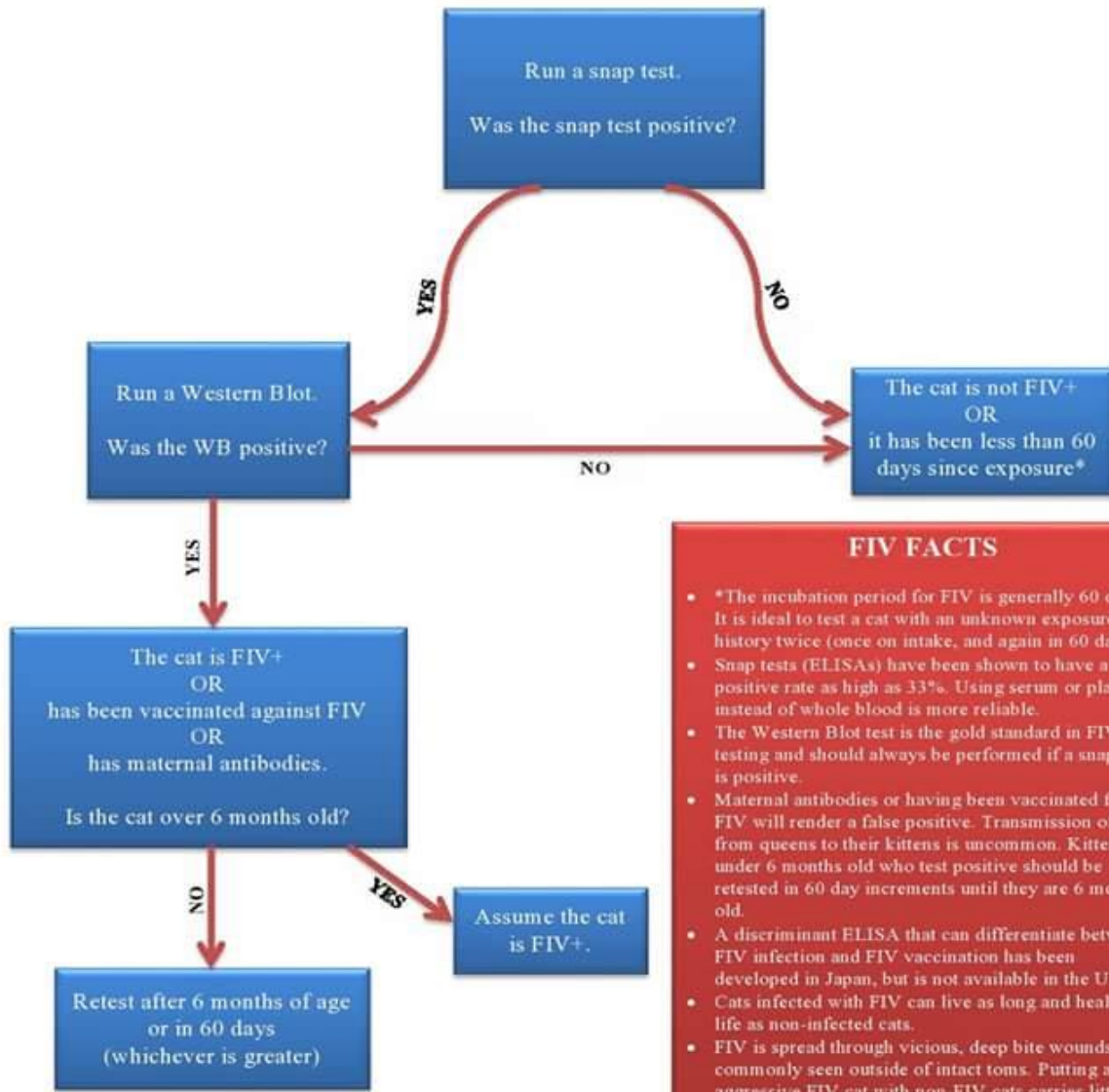
4) Understand the Testing Involved:

Below, I'm posting the testing protocols for both FIV and FeLV, but you must understand the terminology involved with the tests.

- **SNAP (or SNAP Combo):** A test run on whole blood drawn from the cat and performed by the veterinarian, producing results in approximately 10 minutes. It tests for the presence of FIV or FeLV antibodies. **Pros:** Used by a lot of rescues and Animal Shelters because it's inexpensive and gives an indication of POSSIBLE infection quickly. **Cons:** Too many rescues and shelters stop any further testing and assume the cat is positive. The test produces a lot of "false positives" and further testing is needed.
- **Serum ELISA:** Another type of SNAP test, run on blood serum instead of whole blood. **Pros:** Generally, more accurate than a standard SNAP with fewer "false positives". **Cons:** More costly and time consuming than a standard SNAP and still requires further testing if a positive result is given.
- **IFA:** Tests for the presence of the FeLV virus in the bone marrow. **Pros:** This is a much more precise test and if positive, the cat is considered positive for FeLV. **Cons:** Must be sent away to a lab and is more expensive than a SNAP.
- **Western Blot:** More precise test for FIV antigens. The Pros and Cons are the same as for the IFA

I've reduced the definitions down to the basic here in order to keep it simple, but the main message I want to get across is that a positive SNAP test on a cat does NOT necessarily mean that a cat is positive for either FIV or FeLV.....further testing is required. This is why it is good to have at least some temporary fosters in place should the need arise. It is also important to note that most FeLV sanctuaries and rescues will require an IFA test to confirm before accepting a cat.

FIV TESTING PROTOCOL

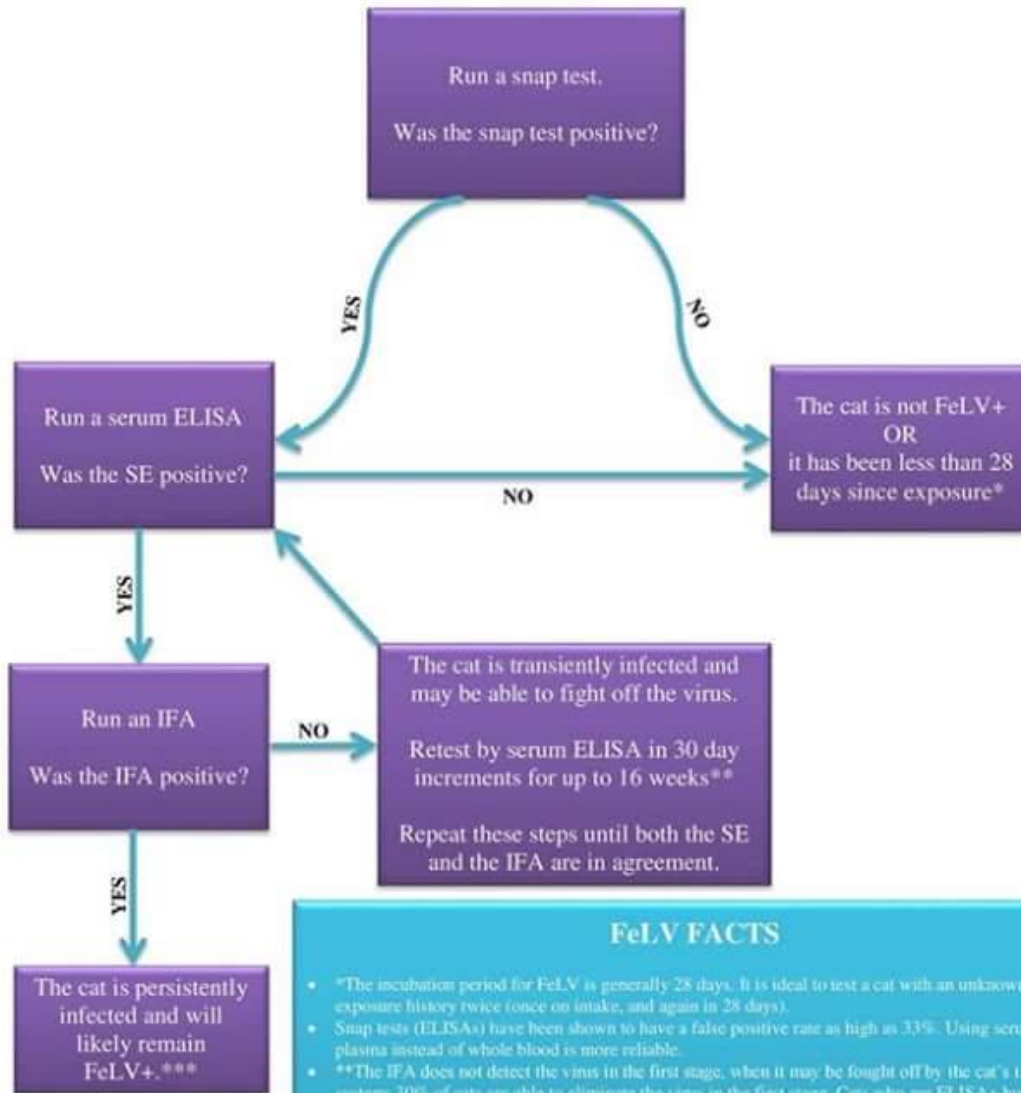


FIV FACTS

- *The incubation period for FIV is generally 60 days. It is ideal to test a cat with an unknown exposure history twice (once on intake, and again in 60 days).
- Snap tests (ELISAs) have been shown to have a false positive rate as high as 33%. Using serum or plasma instead of whole blood is more reliable.
- The Western Blot test is the gold standard in FIV testing and should always be performed if a snap test is positive.
- Maternal antibodies or having been vaccinated for FIV will render a false positive. Transmission of FIV from queens to their kittens is uncommon. Kittens under 6 months old who test positive should be retested in 60 day increments until they are 6 months old.
- A discriminant ELISA that can differentiate between FIV infection and FIV vaccination has been developed in Japan, but is not available in the US.
- Cats infected with FIV can live as long and healthy a life as non-infected cats.
- FIV is spread through vicious, deep bite wounds not commonly seen outside of intact toms. Putting a non-aggressive FIV cat with non-FIV cats carries little to no risk and is at the discretion of the owner.
- The true positive rate for cats in the general population is 1.5-3%.

Last Updated: May 2014

FeLV TESTING PROTOCOL



FeLV FACTS

- *The incubation period for FeLV is generally 28 days. It is ideal to test a cat with an unknown exposure history twice (once on intake, and again in 28 days).
- Snap tests (ELISAs) have been shown to have a false positive rate as high as 33%. Using serum or plasma instead of whole blood is more reliable.
- **The IFA does not detect the virus in the first stage, when it may be fought off by the cat's immune system; 30% of cats are able to eliminate the virus in the first stage. Cats who are ELISA+ but IFA- (first stage) will either eliminate the virus or become IFA+ within 12-16 weeks.
- ***The IFA detects whether the virus has entered the bone marrow (second stage) and is generally irreversible; however, 3-10% of IFA+ cats revert to a negative state.
- It is difficult (but not impossible) for an adult cat to become infected with FeLV. Kittens under 4 months of age are the most susceptible to infection and often do not make it into adulthood.
- Cats infected with FeLV tend to have shorter life spans (the median is 2.4 years), but make wonderful pets.
- FeLV can be spread through all bodily fluids (saliva, nasal secretions, urine, feces, blood, and milk). Bites and grooming are the most common means of transmission; transmission through shared bowls and litter boxes is less common. FeLV+ cats should live alone or with other FeLV+ cats.
- The true positive rate for cats in the general population is 2-3%.

Part 2: Starting the Search

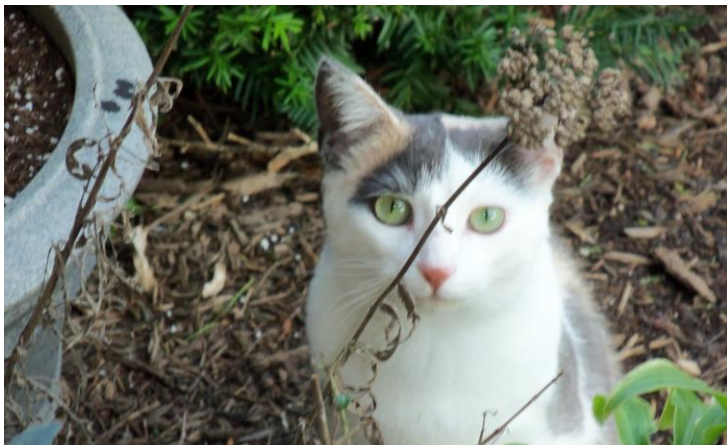
Okay, you've confirmed your cat is actually positive and now you need to move it to a more permanent home. Hopefully, you began the search while waiting for definitive testing. To help you accomplish this, I've outlined my steps for a successful search.

1) Creating Your Post:

By far, the biggest complaint I've seen from would-be rescuers is "How am I supposed to find this cat?" The post put out has no location and no way to contact the person posting the cat other than sending a private message and hoping the person for whom the message is intended, sees it before the cat has lost its chance for a home. To that end, I'm just going to post an example of a GOOD post and point out why it's the perfect post.

FREDERICK, MARYLAND.....FeLV + cat needs a home!

Bobbie Jo, a lovely little dilute calico cat about one year old needs to find a permanent home. Rescued from an apartment complex where she was forced to resort to scrounging from dumpsters for food, she has become an very sweet and loving little girl. Unfortunately, Bobbie Jo has tested positive for FeLV (confirmed by IFA test), making it a little more difficult to find her a loving family. Please consider reaching out and giving her the home she deserves. Contact me via Facebook or by email at mltrac@aol.com if you would like to consider giving Bobbie Jo a place in your heart.



This is a good post because it puts the location (City/State) at the top of the post as well as the reason why she needs a home. Then it gives a brief history that includes her age, sex and states that she's been confirmed positive with an IFA test. It also gives contact information other than Facebook so that if it's shared to Twitter or Instagram, people can still contact you. Remember,

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media goes around the world in a lot of different ways. Don't bother going into explaining about FeLV or FIV. If people need more information, they can contact you. Keep it short and sweet. Above all else: **Remember to put the settings for the post on "PUBLIC"**. I can't tell you how many times I have come across a post that said "Attachment Unavailable" because the settings were limited. If only your friends can see it, it's not going to do you much good.

2) Getting The Word Out:

Start sending your post out to every place you can find. Type FIV or FeLV into your search box on Facebook and send it to every group you can find. It's a good idea to have a list of places handy....making sure you ask permission of the groups before hand. Talk to groups that specialize in FIV and/or FeLV, crossposting groups, even dog groups. Yes, dog groups because even if people are mainly dog lovers, they often don't mind having a cat around and are willing to "save that precious little face from death". Use sites like **Pet Finder** and **Rescue Me** to locate rescues in your area.... It's easy to do, just type in your zipcode and do a search for rescues within 50 miles or however far you're willing to drive. Maddies Fund has a good article called **How to Get Huge Pet Adoption Facebook Post Reach for Just \$5**. (link at the bottom)

3) Other possibilities in Your Local Area:

Visit retirement communities and ask if you can put up flyers in the community rooms. Older people often want a pet, but can't afford to the extra expense. Offer to cover necessary vetting and food/litter if needed. Visit fire stations, even small businesses in your area. There is a wealth of opportunity in your own town if you're willing to do the legwork.

4) Be Proactive:

This is the most important thing.....I don't know how many times I've been asked for help or somebody has posted a cat looking for a home and then.....NOTHING! Crickets chirping as I never hear from them again unless I contact them. Frankly, I don't have that kind of time and my philosophy is: **If you aren't willing to put out a little bit of time and energy to save YOUR rescue.....why should I?** Trust me, I have plenty of other cats waiting for me to save them. Keep updating your original post by editing it. It's very easy to do.....just go to your post, click on that little arrow in the upper right corner and update the information....."still looking for a home", "adoption fell through", "she's lonely", "running out of time". When you update your post.....everywhere that post has gone will get updated and bump it back up to the top of the feed and bring it back to the attention of people.

5) Shameless:

That's what I call this because that's what I am. I beg, I plead, I even try to use the guilt card. I knock down every excuse people have to ignore my cat. If that makes me a terrible person, so be it. I'm saving this cat and I won't quit until I find a safe place for my cat to go. There is absolutely no excuse that I can't argue into the dirt.....trust me, some people have tried and failed miserably.

P.S.- That lovely little girl in my example was my very own Bobbie Jo and her "story" was true. I rescued Bobbie Jo in 2011 and she remained with me until she died on April 19, 2015. It is

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because of her and for her that I am dedicated to saving as many FeLV cats as I can. She was the gift that changed my life forever.

That's it.....that's my advice in a nutshell. I will probably continue to update this as I get suggestions from people, so please feel free to contact me if you have any. I love new possibilities of making contacts.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/LovellLee1226>

Email: mltrac@aol.com

Resources for further information:

Owners of FeLV+/FIV+ Cats: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/26073442228/>

Community Cat FIV/FeLV & Other Special Needs: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/366930630168680/>

FIV testing Information: http://www.fivtherapy.com/fiv_testing.htm?ckattempt=1

FeLV Virus: http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/Health_Information/brochure_felv.cfm

Castaway Critters: <http://www.castawaycritters.org/info/display?PageID=157>

Clinician's Brief: <http://www.cliniciansbrief.com/article/feline-retrovirus-infection>

Maddies Fund: <http://chewonthis.maddiesfund.org/2015/05/how-to-get-huge-pet-adoption-facebook-post-reach-for-just-5/>