

FIV Terminology Protocol: Words Matter

We hear it all the time: “FIV...that’s feline AIDS, right?” No.

At APA!, we do not refer to FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus) as “AIDS” because it is not scientifically accurate, it perpetuates dangerous myths which prevent FIV+ cats from being adopted, and it contributes to their needless deaths in shelters around the country. It is our job to advocate for cats, educate visitors, and dispel outdated shelter policies which harm cats.

For these reasons, when we are faced with the term “Feline AIDS”, all cat program staff is to educate the speaker on why APA! Does not use that term, and why.

The FAQ

A positive test for FIV doesn’t even mean a cat has FIV, let alone AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). Current tests for FIV test for antibodies to FIV, which means that if a cat has previously been vaccinated for FIV, it will test positive for the remainder of the cat’s life. There is no way to tell the difference between an infected cat and a vaccinated cat.

Even if the cat does have FIV, there are different stages of the virus:

- **Stage 1**
 - After initial infection with FIV, a cat may, but usually does not, appear mildly ill. The cat’s body fights the virus, and they may progress to stage 2.
- **Stage 2**
 - In phase 2, cats are usually completely healthy, showing no signs of the virus at all. This stage can, and does, last for many years, if not forever!
- **Stage 3**
 - This is the stage of the virus where it has weakened the immune system and the cat becomes more susceptible to other illnesses. However, this stage usually takes many years to develop, and it may not even develop at all!
 - Stage 3 is the closest resemblance to “AIDS” and remember, not all FIV+ cats even acquire this stage!

FIV is not the same as Feline AIDS. Feline AIDS refers to the final, terminal stages of disease that can be caused by FIV, but not all cats with FIV develop AIDS.