**Feline Herpes Virus**

A sneezing kitten with gunky eyes is a common presentation at the clinic and often this is caused by a viral infection. Feline herpesvirus is a highly contagious virus that is one of the major causes of upper respiratory infections (URIs) or ‘cat flu’ in cats. This virus causes disease in cats all over the world. Together, Feline Herpes Virus (FHV) and Feline Calicivirus (FCV) cause the vast majority of URIs.

The virus is readily transmitted between cats through direct contact, sharing of food bowls and litter trays as well as bedding and grooming tools. Unfortunately, once a cat is infected with FHV it will remain a life-long carrier of the virus. In many cats this causes no problems and they do not continue to shed the virus so are not a risk to others. However, following episodes of stress, or when the immune system is suppressed, some cats will intermittently shed virus again.

These cats will often develop a mild recurrence of the clinical signs. The typical signs are conjunctivitis, discharges from the eyes and nose, sneezing, inappetence, fever and sometimes coughing. Signs can last from a few days to a few weeks. These symptoms are enough for a presumptive diagnosis of FHV (and/or feline Calicivirus). FHV infections are frequently complicated by secondary bacterial infections so supportive treatment with antibiotics is usually required. Steam inhalation or nebulisation may help in cases of severe nasal congestion as the cat will not be able to smell food well. Tinned or sachet foods that are gently warmed will help.

With FHV infection certain anti-viral drugs are available and can be helpful in managing the clinical signs of disease. In colonies, any cat showing clinical signs should be isolated and strict hygiene should be ensured with disinfection, use of separate feeding bowls and litter trays, as well as washing hands between handling cats.

Vaccination for FHV is important for all cats. Three injections are recommended in kittens, starting at around eight weeks of age. Cats should receive a booster at a year of age, and after that should receive further booster vaccines every two years. Vaccination does not necessarily prevent infection with FHV but will greatly reduce the severity of clinical disease.