

# FELINE UPPER RESPIRATORY COMPLEX

## Feline Upper Respiratory Tract Infections

Upper respiratory tract infections are very common in kittens and cats and are usually easily cleared up unless that cat is immune suppressed with either feline leukemia (FeLV) and / or feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV). The infection can be induced by several different respiratory tract viruses and complicated with secondary bacterial infection. Upper respiratory tract infections are highly contagious and spread rapidly through cat populations. Most cats respond to antibiotics and supportive care and should be isolated from other cats until signs resolve. All cats with clinical signs of infection should be screened for FeLV & FIV if a test has not been run recently.

## Symptoms

- Ocular discharge- can be watery, mucoid, or thick green/yellow colored pus
- Eye lids stuck together with dried discharge
- Conjunctivitis (pink eye)
- Sneezing
- Nasal discharge
- Lethargy
- Anorexia
- Fever

## Diagnosis- Based on clinical signs

Most respiratory tract infections are seen in kittens since immunity is built over time. Blood work is usually normal although an elevated white blood cell count can be seen with moderate to severe cases. As with kennel cough complex, progression to bacterial pneumonia is a possibility, especially cats with FeLV & FIV. Cats that do not respond to treatment should be screened for FeLV & FIV, and further diagnostics are indicated including chest radiographs and culture of lung fluid. Chronic infection with lung worms can present with similar signs to URTI.

## Treatment

- Most mild to moderate cases respond to oral antibiotics, and topical administration of antibiotic eye medication. At home nursing care includes cleaning the eyes and nose several times a day, and force feeding if necessary. All infected cats should be isolated from other cats until clinical signs (esp sneezing) has resolved.
- Severe cases that do not respond to conservative therapy require hospitalization, aggressive care (IV fluids & antibiotics) and further diagnostics. Some cats can develop very high fevers and severe corneal ulcers. The ulcers need to be treated aggressively or the eye can rupture causing blindness. Most non-responsive cases are due to development of secondary bacterial pneumonia.

## **Prognosis**

Excellent with conservative care at home for most cats with intact immune systems, fair to poor in cats with FeLV, FIV, or those who have developed pneumonia or have underlying disease.