

Outcome of FeLV-Infected Cats in a Shelter

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BACKGROUND

Approximately 3% of cats are infected with FeLV in the U.S., including an estimated 60,000 cats admitted to animal shelters each year. It is a common practice in many shelters to euthanize cats following a single positive test, regardless of their health status. Austin Pets Alive! (APA!), a large animal shelter in Austin, Texas, has developed a unique program for adoption of hundreds of FeLV-infected each year. The purpose of this study was to characterize the outcome of cats diagnosed with FeLV and referred to the APA! adoption program.



Age: 1 year
Hometown: Chicago, Illinois
3 words that describe me: playful, smart, charming
Talent: Giving high-fives
Best attribute: My beautiful eyes
Favorite toy: Feather wand
Favorite fashion trend: Stripes
Outcome: Adopted on 7/13/19



METHODS

Shelter

APA! is a nonprofit limited-admission animal shelter focusing primarily on animals at risk for euthanasia at other shelters. Cats diagnosed with FeLV were sent to APA! from shelters, rescue groups, and individuals across North America.

FeLV Diagnosis

APA! retested cats at intake for FeLV using whole blood in an IDEXX SNAP test. Cats with a negative result were deemed uninfected. Cats with a positive result were retested using serum; if that test was negative, cats were deemed uninfected. If the serum test was positive, cats were deemed infected. Kittens born in the shelter were tested at birth, and those born in foster care were tested at their first wellness examination at 4-6 weeks of age.

Adoption Program

Adopter support included education about FeLV, waived adoption fees, and free post-adoption veterinary care for conditions attributed to FeLV infection.

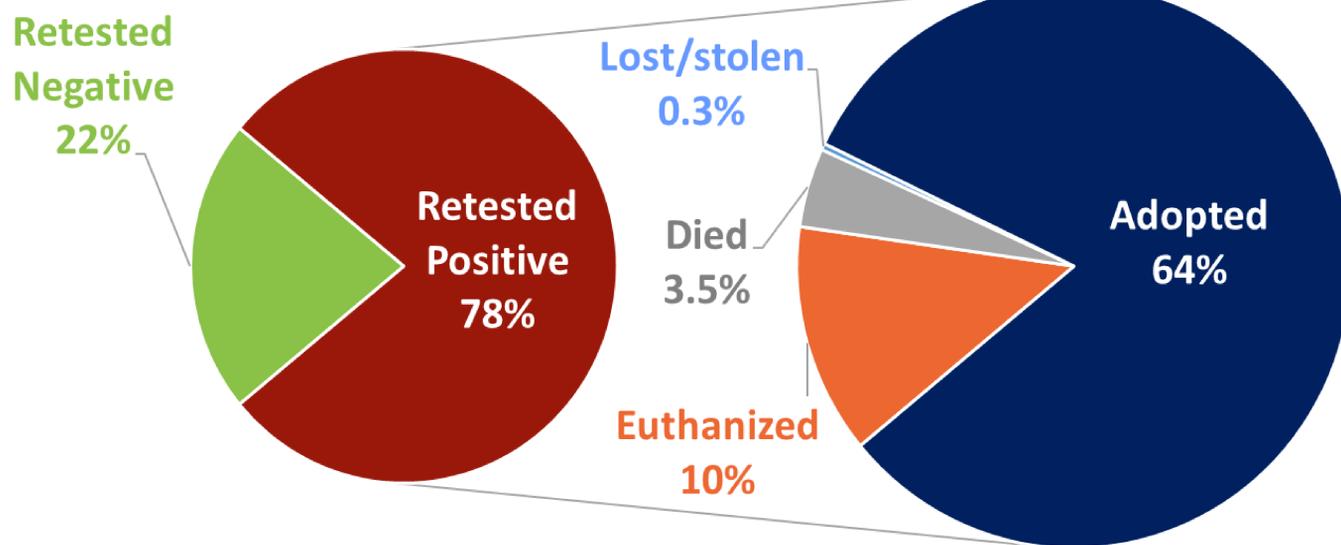


Figure 1. Outcome of 677 cats referred to the FeLV adoption program



Figure 2. Cats suspected of FeLV infection were sent from 19 states, Puerto Rico, and Mexico to the Texas adoption program

RESULTS

801 cats entered the FeLV program from January 2018 to June 2019. Of these, 677 cats had a final outcome from the FeLV program (Figure 1).

- 149 cats retested negative at intake → exited FeLV program
- 528 FeLV+ cats had a final outcome
- 124 FeLV+ cats remained in shelter/foster care

The health of cats at the time of intake was not significantly different between cats that retested positive or negative (Table 1).

Table 1: Medical conditions at the time of intake in cats retesting positive or negative for FeLV

Characteristic	No. retested positive (%) N=652	No. retested negative (%) N=149	P-value
None recorded	377 (58)	90 (60)	0.6
At least one condition recorded	275 (42)	59 (40)	0.6
<i>Specific condition</i>			
Upper respiratory infection	106 (16)	29 (19)	0.4
Ocular Disease	39 (6)	3 (2)	0.06
Ringworm	36 (6)	5 (3)	0.3
Dehydration	31 (5)	2 (1)	0.07
FIV+	30 (5)	12 (8)	0.1
Oral Disease	29 (4)	12 (8)	0.1

CONCLUSIONS

- There was high national demand for a lifesaving option for cats diagnosed with FeLV.
- FeLV infections could not be confirmed in nearly one in four cats referred to the FeLV program, a reminder of the risk behind basing the fate of a cat on a single positive test result.
- Illness at the time of intake was not different between cats with confirmed FeLV infection and those that retested negative, illustrating the importance of not attributing all medical conditions in FeLV+ cats to their viral state.
- The vast majority of cats referred to the FeLV program were adopted, demonstrating that programs centered around adopter education and support can create lifesaving outcomes for most FeLV-infected cats, despite uncertainty regarding their long-term prognosis.



General George Pawshington



Frankenstein



Mandalay



Buster

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