

Feline Upper Respiratory Disease (FURD)

Feline respiratory disease complex (FURD) includes those illnesses typified by sneezing, snotty nose, conjunctivitis, excessive tears, drooling, eye and mouth ulcers.

The principal diseases involved in Feline Upper Respiratory Disease Complex (FURD or “cat flu”) are: Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis (FVR and Feline Herpesvirus Type 1), Feline Calicivirus (FCV), *Chlamydomphila Felis*, *Mycoplasma Felis*, or combinations of these infections. Concurrent bacterial infections may further complicate infection. FVR and FCV are cat specific and pose no known human risk. Human conjunctivitis caused by the Feline Chlamydial agent has been reported in severely immune suppressed people.

How do cats catch FURD?

The viruses and bacteria involved are highly contagious and are shed in saliva and secretions of infected cats. Susceptible cats can get the diseases from environmental exposure to contaminated objects and people, or direct contact with infected cats. Convalescent cats may harbor virus for many months and “stress” may initiate a secondary bout of illness and future recurrences. Once a cat is exposed to an infectious agent it will have an incubation period of 2-10 days for these infections. An uncomplicated infection will typically last for 7-21 days depending on the disease agent.

How do we treat an FURD affected cat?

Most cats with an uncomplicated upper respiratory infection can be treated symptomatically at home. This will likely include medicated eye drops, antibiotics, and anti-inflammatory medications.

Some cats with nasal or airway congestion can benefit from increased humidity. At home this can be done by taking them into a steamy bathroom for 10-15 minutes several times per day or using a children’s humidifier (available from chemists). Keeping their face, nose and eyes discharge free helps minimise discomfort and secondary infections. Occasionally, we need to hospitalize a patient for more intensive treatment where the disease causes significant discomfort and distress that cannot be managed at home.

How can I prevent my other cat getting FURD?

It is not always possible to prevent upper respiratory disease in cats, as not all of the causes can be vaccinated against. However, the standard vaccine that is given to cats protects against two of the common FURD causes - Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis and Feline Calicivirus. Adult cats who have been vaccinated will most likely show mild signs of infection but many will develop no signs of infection.

What are the long-term consequences of FURD?

The severity of infection varies greatly with this common disease complex. In some cases the viral infections may do permanent damage to the delicate mucosal lining of the nose and the underlying bones. This may result in permanent changes, which means a long-term susceptibility to bacterial infection in the nose. This is called by post-viral rhinitis or “Chronic snuffler” and unfortunately, we cannot predict which cats will become affected at the acute stage of infection.

In some cases stress can cause recurring infections from the virus itself. This occurs in carrier cats. Not all cats become carriers, and it is unpredictable which cats will be carriers except in the case of cats diagnosed with Feline Herpes Virus infection. Herpes never leaves the body and so these cats will always be at risk of a repeated bout of Herpes.