

Vaccine helps prevent deadly feline virus

By Tom Panzenhagen
staff writer

Your cat probably has feline leukemia virus.

The virus — FeLV, for short — is common in about 60 percent of domesticated cats, and is most common where more than one cat lives in a household or cats are allowed to roam outdoors.

Half the cats with FeLV are carriers of the disease and exhibit no outward signs of infection, but the other half will get sick. And 80 percent of those cats will die within three years.

There is no cure.

The figures are provided by veterinarians Dr. Dennis Kovan and Ron Mehler, who have treated about 10 cases of FeLV this year. Their clinics are in Redford Township and Novi.

"THE VIRUS was unknown 20 years ago, and when I look back and think about the cats that were sick and didn't respond to treatment, I know now that they must have had feline leukemia virus," said Kovan, who has been a veterinarian for 28 years.

The doctors have sent letters to all cat owners they know, recommending testing and vaccination for FeLV. "Recent advances in veterinary medicine have increased our ability to diagnose, treat and prevent this disease," the letters state.

The test costs about \$18 and the vaccinations are \$15 apiece for three injections administered over a two- or three-month period, Kovan said. Cats

that are tested must be at least 9 weeks old.

"But we have not been getting much response," Kovan said. "So we discuss it at length with cat owners when they bring their cats in (for unrelated treatments), and most opt to have the vaccinations once we talk to them one-on-one."

FeLV ACTUALLY is a complex of diseases encompassing blood cell cancers such as leukemia, lymphosarcoma (a malignant disease of lymphatic tissue), and associated illnesses such as respiratory disease and reproductive failure.

"Calling it a virus is really a misnomer, and true leukemia is rare in cats," Mehler said.

Kovan said, "It most often results in chronic infections, tumors or anemia, because it attacks a cat's immune system, rendering it useless."

Symptoms vary but may include: "listlessness, a poor appetite, or the cat will become anemic, its gums will be pale to white in color, there may be wounds that are difficult to heal, they may have sores in the mouth or difficulty in breathing," Kovan said.

"There is no specific treatment for the virus itself, only symptomatic care," Kovan said. "We will treat with fluids or antibiotics depending upon the symptoms."

"The vaccine won't cure the disease — it's a prophylactic, a preventative."

KOVAN SAID some cats may have "the natural capabilities to withstand



ART EMANUEL/staff photographer

Dr. Dennis Kovan and Lori Wolke, a licensed veterinary technician, draw blood from a cat for testing for feline leukemia virus. The disease has

no cure, but a vaccine will prevent cats from acquiring it.

the virus," but most cats with FeLV will die within three years.

Mehler said cats with FeLV pose no threat to humans or other pets.

"It has not been demonstrated in any way that FeLV is linked to human disease. If I owned a cat with FeLV, I

wouldn't have any worries (about contracting the disease) at all," he said.

However, a brochure on FeLV states: "Many public health officials and FeLV researchers . . . believe the safest policy at this time is strict isolation of any cat diagnosed as FeLV-infected."

The disease is transmitted among cats by saliva, urine and feces of infected cats. Thus it is virtually impossible to prevent contact with the disease unless a cat is kept indoors and away from other cats at all times, the doctors said.

Business master's offered at college

Madonna College, Livonia, has adapted graduate studies in management for the part-time, fully employed student. This program will be discussed at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 20 in the new Krueger Hall on the Madonna campus. The public is invited.

The Madonna master of science in administration degree is geared to the practitioner in either business or nursing. It consists of a 36-hour program containing six core courses in management theory plus specialty courses in business and nursing. All classes are scheduled during evening hours.

Students currently enrolled in the master's program will be present at the discussion to relate experience juggling graduate studies, home responsibilities and employment.

The admission and degree requirements will be described by Ernest Nolan, director of graduate studies and associate directors, Charlotte Neuhauer and Janet Wolf.

A reception will follow the presentation which will provide an opportunity for informal discussion with the graduate faculty members.

Madonna College is at 1-98 and Levan Road in Livonia, about 10 miles west of the Detroit city limits. There is adequate free, lighted and patrolled parking.

For further information, call 591-5049.

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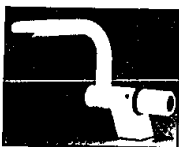
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