

Conjunctivitis – Feline Herpes Viral

What is feline herpesviral conjunctivitis?

Conjunctivitis is the medical term used to describe inflammation of the tissues surrounding the eye. These tissues include the lining of the lids and the third eyelid as well as the tissues covering the front part of the eye or globe. Conjunctivitis may be a primary condition or may be secondary to an underlying systemic or ocular (eye) disease (see also our handout "Conjunctivitis").

Feline herpesvirus conjunctivitis is a form of primary conjunctivitis caused by the highly infectious feline herpesvirus (FHV-1). Herpesvirus infection is the most common cause of conjunctivitis in cats. In most cases, herpesvirus conjunctivitis is self-limiting and will resolve within two weeks. Many cats that are infected with FHV-1 do not show any signs of clinical illness (i.e. they have a *latent infection*). Although less than 45% of adult cats with latent herpesvirus infection develop recurrent ocular disease such as conjunctivitis, approximately 80% of infected cats will become permanent carriers

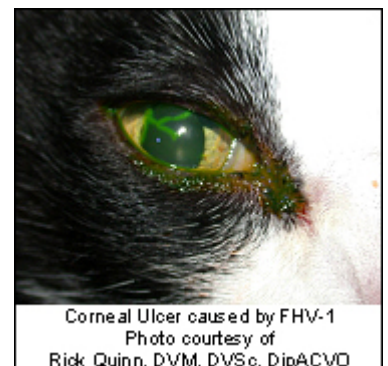
What are the clinical signs of feline herpesviral conjunctivitis?

"Signs often appear suddenly and are especially common after stressful situations."

The most common clinical signs of conjunctivitis are squinting or closing of the eye, red, swollen tissue surrounding the eye and eyelids, ocular discharge that may range from clear to yellow-greenish in color, and upper respiratory symptoms such as sneezing or nasal discharge. These signs often appear suddenly and are especially common after stressful situations such as travel, boarding, surgery or illness. Chemosis, a condition in which the membranes that line the eyelids and surface of the eye appear to have fluid in them, is more commonly associated with *Chlamydomydia felis* infections (for further details on this disease, see the handout called "Chlamydiosis").

What diagnostic testing is indicated for feline herpesviral conjunctivitis?

Diagnosis is based primarily on medical history and physical examination. Corneal staining with fluorescein dye is often performed to look for any ulcers that may have developed. Identification of feline herpesvirus DNA by polymerase chain reaction amplification (PCR testing) is the most sensitive test available for diagnosing infection by FHV-1. Unfortunately, if the virus is in a latent state (the patient is not showing clinical signs), diagnostic testing is usually not rewarding. Since decreased tear film production has been associated with FHV-1 conjunctivitis, specific tests to assess the tear production may be recommended.



What is the treatment for feline herpesviral conjunctivitis?

"If there are corneal ulcers, it is important to treat these appropriately."

Treatment is determined by your cat's specific clinical signs and problems. It is important to remember that these infections are usually mild and self-limiting. However, if there are corneal ulcers, it is important to treat these appropriately to prevent permanent damage (for further details, see our handout "Corneal Ulcers").

The following is a list of common treatment regimens used in treating recurrent feline herpesviral conjunctivitis:

- Idoxuridine ophthalmic solution
- Vidarabine 3% ophthalmic ointment
- Trifluridine ophthalmic solution
- L-lysine
- Interferon- α
- Vaccination with the intranasal herpes and calicivirus vaccine two to three times a year may be beneficial in stimulating local immunity
- Acyclovir, an oral antiviral medication may be used in severe or poorly responsive cases. Because of its potential toxicity in cats, only cats with a confirmed herpesvirus infection should receive this medication, and it should be started at a low dose. With this medication, it is necessary to monitor the CBC (Complete Blood Count, a type of blood test) every two to three weeks

What is the prognosis for a cat diagnosed with herpesviral conjunctivitis?

"There is no cure for herpesvirus infections."

There is no cure for herpesvirus infections. The therapeutic goal is to reduce the frequency and severity of recurrences. Most cats respond well to medical management and lead relatively normal lives. Minimizing the chance of infection, feeding a premium diet, supplementing the diet with L-lysine daily, reducing stressful situations and proper vaccination against preventable causes are your cat's best defense.

This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM

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