



## FIV Vaccine: The Facts

Feline immunodeficiency virus causes a disease in cats that is somewhat analogous to AIDS in humans. It is a virus that disrupts the immune system by infecting certain populations of white blood cells and severely affecting their functions. It is thought to be transmitted from cat to cat sexually, in blood or saliva through bites or fight wounds, and to kittens in the womb or during nursing. The exact prevalence of FIV in this country is not known but it may be as high as 25% in cats with high risk of exposure and in clinically ill cats. Cats in a low risk environment (strictly indoors) and healthy cats probably have a lower prevalence (2% - 3%). Once infected with the virus, cats may not show any clinical signs for a variable length of time. Signs commonly include fever, lethargy, weight loss, vomiting/diarrhea, ocular disease, abscesses, enlarged lymph nodes, signs similar to an upper respiratory infection, neurological signs and stomatitis (a painful inflammatory condition inside the mouth). Just as in humans with AIDS, FIV positive cats are highly susceptible to numerous opportunistic infections. FIV

proceeds to a terminal stage and death may be due to a variety of causes. At this time there are no proven effective long term treatments for FIV positive cats, only



symptomatic therapy.

In July, 2002 Fort Dodge Animal Health released a vaccine for FIV, Fel-O-Vax® FIV. While this was welcome news for everyone involved in animal health, the subject of vaccinating cats for FIV is not a straightforward one. Controversial issues include questions about efficacy, veterinary

public health, and the ability to diagnose cats that are infected. The following is a brief summary of some pertinent points included in a recent information brief from the American Association of Feline Practitioners:

**Testing implications:** The most commonly used FIV tests cannot distinguish between a vaccinated cat and a true FIV positive cat. In order to protect the cat population in this country, many shelters and clinics humanely euthanize stray FIV positive cats. Widespread use of the vaccine could result in unnecessary euthanasia of numerous cats.

**Vaccine efficacy:** FIV is classified into 5 subtypes based on genetic variation. Subtypes A and B are the dominant ones in the United States. In a research setting, Fel-O-Vax® FIV protected 82% of cats when challenged with subtype A. Research so far suggests that Fel-O-Vax® FIV would have little efficacy against other subtypes of FIV. What does this mean for cat owners? The decision whether or not to vaccinate should be made following discussion with your veterinarian of the many issues involved, the most significant being the risk factors for each individual cat.

## Staff News



### Welcome!

Dr. Laura Steadman will be joining the veterinary staff at Shoal Creek Animal Clinic this Spring. Dr. Steadman is a native of Tucker, Georgia. She earned a B.S. in Biochemistry at

the University of Georgia and a Master in Biology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill before graduating from the University of Georgia's College of Veterinary Medicine. Dr. Steadman was a recipient of numerous honors during her academic career, including Phi Beta Kappa and the Phi Zeta Society of Veterinary Medicine. She is skilled in the general practice of small animal medicine and surgery and has special interest in animal behavior, exotic animals, and wildlife rehabilitation. In her free time she

enjoys running, biking, and reading. She lives in Athens with her two dogs and two cats.

Whitney vonKutzleben is our new receptionist. Originally from Illinois, Whitney now lives on a 37 acre farm in Bishop with her husband, Ed, three sons, Jacob, Erich, and Karl, their dog, cat, and large assortment of farm animals. When not taking care of her menagerie, Whitney enjoys reading, hiking, and making crafts.

Tara Barrentine and Katie Shreve are our newest veterinary assistants. Tara is an ecology major at UGA whose interests include conservation/wildlife ecology and veterinary medicine. Between work and school, Tara enjoys taking time for long runs and listening to music. Katie is a newcomer to Athens, having just moved from West Virginia where she received a degree in English literature from Marshall University. Katie's love of animals has led her to pursue a career in veterinary medicine. She plans to enroll in the University of Georgia this Fall to begin her premedical curriculum. Katie enjoys reading, playing with her two cats, Eliza and

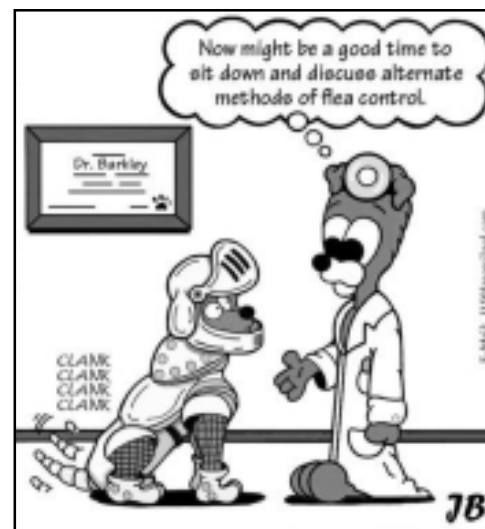
Phoenix, and hiking with her dog Willa.

### *Aurevoir, not Adieu...*

Dr. Elizabeth Nesbit will be taking an extended leave of absence this Spring following the birth of her first child. The baby is due March 8.

## Family Practice

by Jason Ballenger



See Family Practice at <http://www.shoalcreek.com>

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## Just the FAQ's (Part 2)

This edition of Shoal Creek News features Part 2 in our series on questions frequently asked by clients.

### 1. Can I give my pet my cold?

Dogs and cats do not catch human colds. In addition, while dogs and cats do get upper respiratory infections, these illnesses are species specific and do not affect people. However, ferrets are very susceptible to the human influenza virus.

### 2. My cat is coughing. What do you think it might be?

There are many possible causes of coughing in cats including such things as hair balls, upper respiratory infection, parasites, and heart disease. It is advisable to have your pet examined by the veterinarian if it is coughing.

### 3. My dog's nose is dry. Does that mean he's sick?

Not necessarily. There is a considerable amount of confusion regarding the importance of a cold, warm, wet, or dry nose in a dog and what it signifies about the animal's health. There is no standard which applies to all pets in all situations. Most dogs will periodically lick their noses and, due to evaporation, most wet noses feel cold. One might think, therefore, that healthy dogs have wet, cold noses. However, not all dogs repeatedly lick their noses. Since a dog's body temperature is several degrees higher than our own, a dry nose in a healthy dog may feel warm to the touch. There are much more important signs to look for to assess your pet's health than the moisture and heat status of its nose. (For example, vomiting, diarrhea, coughing, sneezing, loss of appetite, loss of energy, increased water consumption, increased urination, etc.)

### 4. Is it OK to give my cat some milk occasionally as a treat?

As cats age, their ability to digest milk fats and proteins often declines. The traditional belief that cats should get a saucer of milk may cause vomiting or diarrhea. If you would like to give your cat a treat periodically, use commercially available cat treats that have been designed with your pet's health in mind.

### 5. Is it OK to give my dog real bones to chew on?

Most veterinarians do not recommend allowing dogs to chew on real bones. Bones are either too soft and result in fragments which can cause GI tears or obstruction, or the bones are too hard and lead to fractured teeth. Contrary to popular belief, domestic dogs are **not** just like their wild cousins (wolves, coyotes, and foxes). Commercially available chew toys are the best for our pets.

### 6. My dog has a bald spot. What could be its cause?

There are many possible causes of hair loss in pets. The three most common are ringworm, mange, and fleas. Any sign of hair loss should be evaluated as some of the causes can affect the pet owner as well.

### 7. Can I catch mange from my dog?

Possibly. There are several different types of "mange" in dogs. Sarcoptic mange, or scabies, is contagious between people and pets. This is known as a zoonotic disease. If your pet has sarcoptic mange, treat as directed by your veterinarian and watch for any rash-like symptoms on your own skin. If they develop, seek medical advice from your physician.

### 8. My pet is constantly scratching, but I do not see any fleas. What could be causing this?

The laundry list of possible causes of excessive scratching is quite long. Parasites are certainly at the top of the list (fleas, ticks, mange, etc.) However, there are many other causes which can be much more difficult to diagnose. Allergic, bacterial, fungal, metabolic, neoplastic, and even psychological disorders can cause pruritis, the sensation that provokes the desire to scratch, rub, chew, or lick. All animals will scratch occasionally but constant scratching is abnormal and should be evaluated by your veterinarian.

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## New Heartworm Preventive

Heartworm disease is a serious problem for dogs throughout the entire year in the Southeast. Now there is a new option for preventing heartworm disease in dogs - ProHeart® 6 from Fort Dodge Pharmaceuticals. The active ingredient is moxidectin, a close relative to the products in monthly oral heartworm preventives. However, ProHeart® 6 is a sustained release product that prevents heartworm disease for six months and, therefore, only needs to be given twice a year. ProHeart® 6 is an injectable product that must be given by a licensed veterinarian. The injection is given in the same manner as a vaccine. Because ProHeart® 6 should only be used in healthy animals, a physical exam and heartworm check is required before injection. ProHeart® 6 has been approved for use in animals 6 months of age or older. ProHeart® 6 eliminates potential problems with monthly or daily oral heartworm preventives because the primary reason for heartworm infection in dogs on oral preventive is a failure to use the product as instructed. Other causes include loss of protection due to vomiting/regurgitation of product or the pet simply spitting out the preventive medication. Fort Dodge offers a guarantee on their product providing the patient is tested again for heartworms six months after the initial injection.



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*In This Issue... FIV Vaccine, The SCAC FAQ 2, ProHeart 6, Staff News*

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