Although FeLV vaccines have been shown to protect some cats against progressive infection, vaccination will not always prevent proviral DNA integration after FeLV exposure. One study using inactivated vaccines found that, after challenge, vaccinated cats had no detectable viral antigen, viral RNA, proviral DNA or infectious virus. Other studies showed that several current vaccines failed to consistently prevent proviral DNA integration following FeLV exposure. Therefore, it cannot be concluded that FeLV vaccination protects against all outcomes of FeLV infection. Nevertheless, several current vaccines are still of great clinical importance because they appear to be efficacious at preventing progressive infection and, thus, curtailing FeLV-associated diseases. Several early studies indicated that duration of immunity to FeLV persists for at least 12 months following vaccination and, in one study, most cats resisted infection when challenged 2 years after vaccination.

Vaccination against FeLV does not diminish the importance of testing to identify and isolate cats that are progressively infected. Vaccinated and unvaccinated cats that are progressively infected could be sources of infection for other cats. Vaccination against FeLV does not interfere with testing, as the available POC tests detect viral antigen. Therefore, the FeLV infection status of all cats, including vaccinated cats, should be determined. Administering FeLV vaccines to infected cats is of no therapeutic value and every unnecessary vaccination carries the risk of potential adverse reactions. If a vaccinated cat’s status is unknown and the cat is later determined to have a progressive FeLV infection, vaccine efficacy would be questioned, and vaccine failure suspected. Cats should be tested for FeLV infection before initial vaccination.

The 2013 AAFP vaccination guidelines recommended FeLV vaccination for all kittens up to and including 1 year of age, and for at-risk adult cats. Vaccination of all kittens is highly recommended (at least in areas with high prevalence of infection) because a kitten’s lifestyle and risk of exposure to FeLV frequently changes after acquisition. In addition, kittens are more susceptible to progressive infection, FeLV-associated disease and death if exposed to FeLV compared with adult cats.

When FeLV vaccination is determined to be appropriate, a two-dose primary series is recommended, with the first dose administered as early as 8 weeks of age followed by a second dose administered 3–4 weeks later. A single booster vaccination should be administered 1 year following completion of the initial series. Vaccination can be discontinued thereafter if there is no further risk based on...